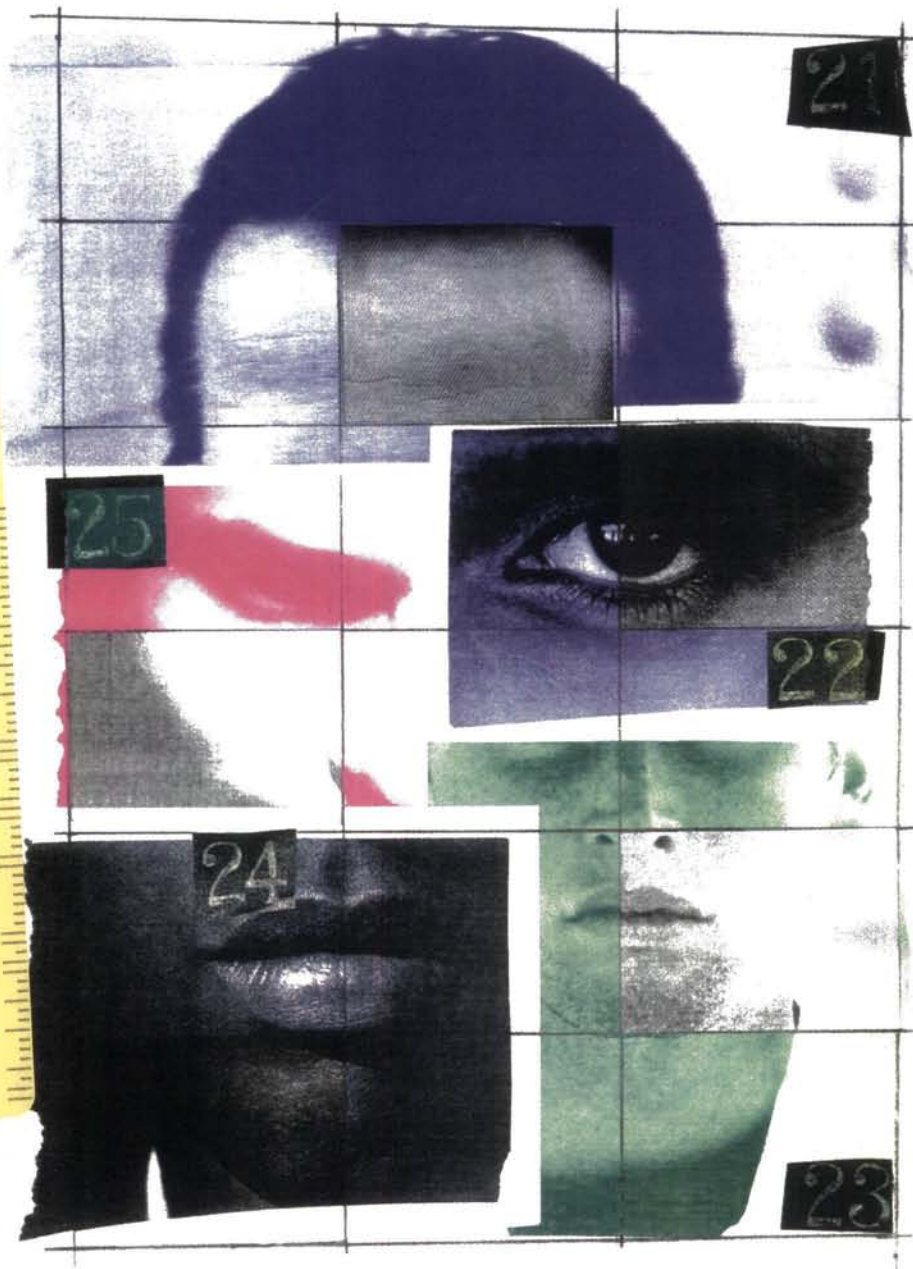


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THE 20SOMETHING MYTH



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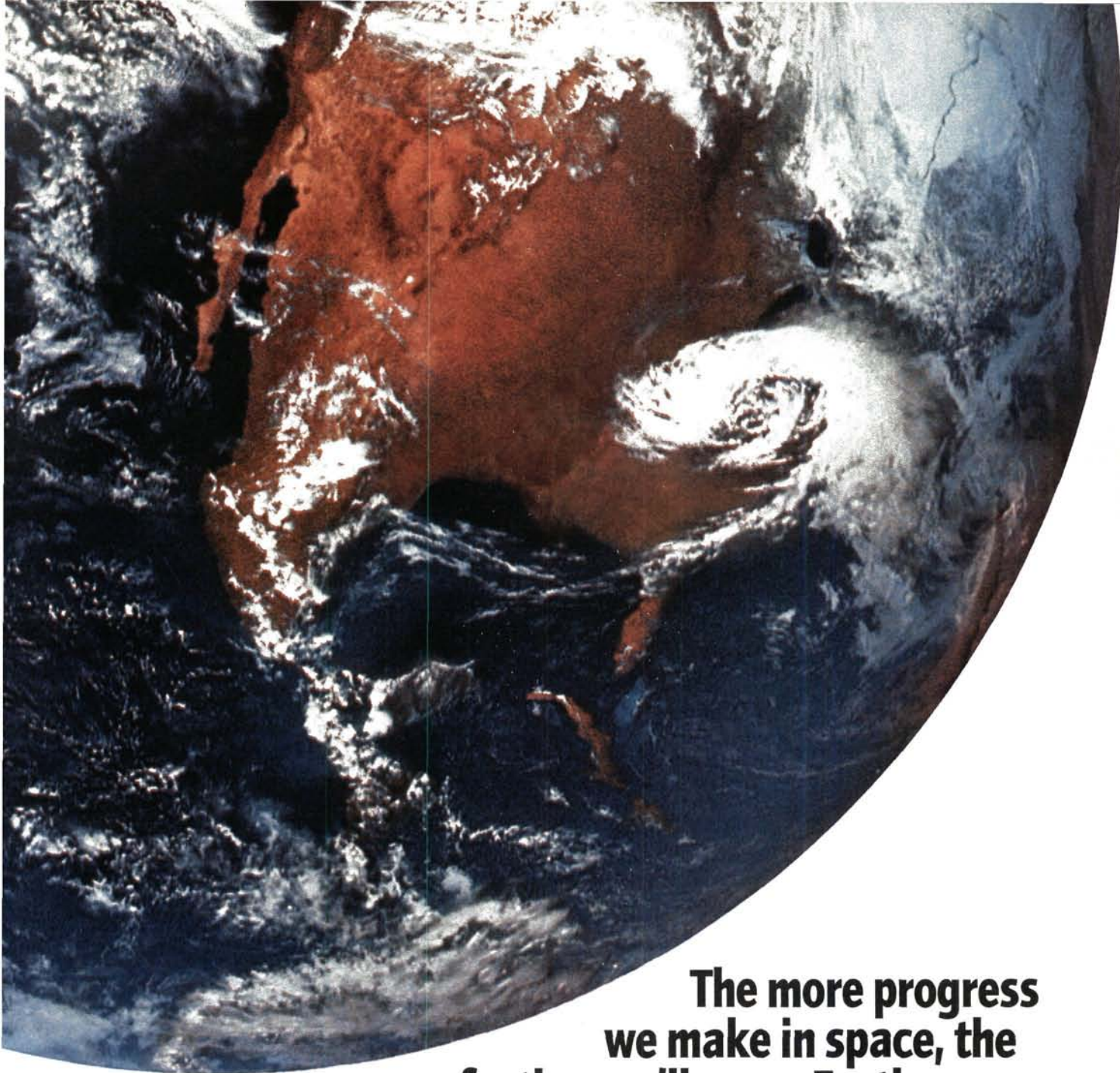
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CORRESPONDENCE

Philosophy of Reich

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus on Robert Reich ("The Policy Hustler," December 7) gets his facts right but the broad picture wrong.

Yes, Reich did not take a Ph.D. in economics. Many of us also know that the Kennedy School economists view him with suspicion and possibly contempt. Of course, we are a tough bunch that is hard to please: Kaus might have been amused to hear the members of the economics department at Harvard pronounce on the merits of their Kennedy School colleagues.

But surely credentialism is a vice, not a virtue. Reich is an intellectual whose writings on economic issues have justifiably engaged our attention.

To condemn him for getting his numbers wrong is also downright silly. Who does not? Lester Thurow is maligned by his foes as "less than thorough." Ken Galbraith does not even stoop to consider numbers. Original ideas, expressed with an articulation that irrevocably concentrates our mind on them, are worth a thousand numbers.

For my money, Reich's latest thoughts on the effects of the globalization of the world economy are on the ball. *The Work of Nations* remains the most eloquent and analytical statement of the global nature of economic activity today and the need to return to "fundamentals" such as education, training, and retraining to cope with its probable effects on the wages of the unskilled et al. Both the analysis and the proposed solutions will be debated through the 1990s. But Reich at least starts us at the right place.

In eschewing now the Japan fixation of many Clinton supporters, and in his liberal cosmopolitanism, Reich also offers us the best prospect of containing the xenophobic, "what is in it for the USA" edge that the campaign exhibited.

JAGDISH BHAGWATI
New York, New York

To the editors:

I found Mickey Kaus's cover story about Robert Reich mean and cruel. Why were all these flaws only discovered by TNR when Reich received a prominent position on the transition team and not when he was appointed a contributing editor? All TNR writers will have to look over their shoulders now for attacks by their brethren once they achieve prominence that makes other staff jealous. It is too bad that instead of congratulating

Reich and wishing him well in what is obviously a complex and difficult job, TNR found it necessary to attack a colleague. Not much loyalty in this group.

FREDERICK WISEMAN
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

I wish to protest vehemently your choice of the words "The New Reich" in reference to Robert Reich, printed on the cover of the December 7 issue. It was pure sensationalism, a play on words implying that the incoming administration of Bill Clinton somehow has a connection to the Third Reich, an entity abhorrent to the Jewish people.

Reich and Clinton deserve better than this, and so does the readership of your magazine. I believe an apology is in order.

RACHEL MELAMED
Carmichael, California

And the ban played on

To the editors:

Your editorial in favor of ending the ban against homosexuals in the military ("Ending the Ban," December 7) is fundamentally flawed. You "believe that the right to serve one's country is as fundamental to the idea of equal citizenship as any right can be"; but the purpose of the military is not to provide an opportunity to "serve one's country" to anyone. No one has a right to military service, and we properly keep many people from serving based on military readiness criteria (physical and mental standards).

You also incorrectly equate the ban against homosexuals in the military to the former ban against blacks. But racial identity is based on skin pigmentation and other physical features; homosexuality is based on behavior. Many, if not most, Americans consider homosexual behavior to be sinful. Many others believe that homosexuality is abnormal and should not be encouraged. What these people profess is not an unreasonable prejudice to be overcome by "education."

You fatuously claim that the "focus on sexual attraction is ... overrated" because the military "by and large, has dorm room facilities and individual showers." But those facilities and showers are part of a "peacetime" environment. We maintain military forces to fight wars, a fact that you seem to ignore. During wartime, communal showers and barracks will be the rule, just as they are now aboard Navy ships and submarines. Do you think that women forced to shower with men would accept your argument that "grown-up people can adjust"? Nor will most heterosexual men

and women if they are forced into intimate environments with homosexuals.

ANDREW G. VAN SANT
Commander, USNR
Annapolis, Maryland

To the editors:

You state, "Living intimately with those who might be the focus of sexual attraction ... is overrated.... Surely grown-up people can adjust." But the Navy provides separate facilities to people living with those they *know* may be sexually attracted to them. Funding and shipboard space aren't available to separate gay men from "straight" and gay men! If the ban were lifted and a man (gay or not) were raped, the government (*knowing* sexual attraction may exist) would be liable for not providing separate facilities.

Should a man be convicted of raping a woman if the government required him to share shower and sleeping facilities with her? As a submarine commander, one of my men (gay) violated a shipmate at sea. Could the government have convicted him if, *knowing* he was homosexual, it didn't provide separate facilities?

Solve these issues *before* lifting the ban and lifting people's right to privacy from those known to be sexually attracted to them.

Just out of curiosity, did TNR publish this article on December 7 on purpose?

DAVID F. TUMA
Captain, USN (Retired)
Port Hueneme, California

Making hate

To the editors:

What a cold, vicious piece of work Katha Pollitt's review of my book *Making Love* was ("The Prisoner of Sex," November 9). My point of view is hardly Stakhanovite, as Pollitt claims, but hers is evidently Stalinist.

I expected better of TNR, to which I subscribe and which I follow with enthusiasm. I hope your readers will approach *Making Love* with open minds. In case they couldn't tell through the clank of Pollitt's sneering, it's a straightforward memoir of one human being's sexual experience, honestly recalled.

RICHARD RHODES
Madison, Connecticut

Jack and Jim

To the editors:

Jim Holt misconceives the lesson of his intriguing thought experiment ("Misconception," December 7), as the following variation on his experiment illus-

trates. Assume that science develops to the point that an adult human who is surgically bifurcated will have each of his halves regenerate its missing parts. (Far-fetched? Probably. But, hey, it's a thought experiment.) Harry, a 21-year-old, undergoes this cleavage procedure, yielding identical adult twins Hal and Hank. What happened to Harry? Under Holt's reasoning, the only possible conclusion is that 21-year-old Harry was not a person! The absurdity of this conclusion shows that Holt's thought experiment has no bearing on whether the pre-twinning entity is a person. Rather, its real lesson is merely that the mystery of twinning is foreign to our conventional categories of thinking. If anything, the possibility that a fertilized egg might develop as two individuals rather than as one should enhance the case for its protection.

Holt's larger error is his assumption that if a fertilized egg is not a "person," destroying it raises no serious moral issue. Whether or not we are disposed to apply the label "person," a fertilized egg is a live, genetically complete organism of the species *Homo sapiens* and is in the course of developing (so long as it remains alive) through the various stages of human life. Why shouldn't it be recognized to have a moral claim against those whose voluntary actions have placed it in a position of dependence?

EDWARD WHELAN
Arlington, Virginia

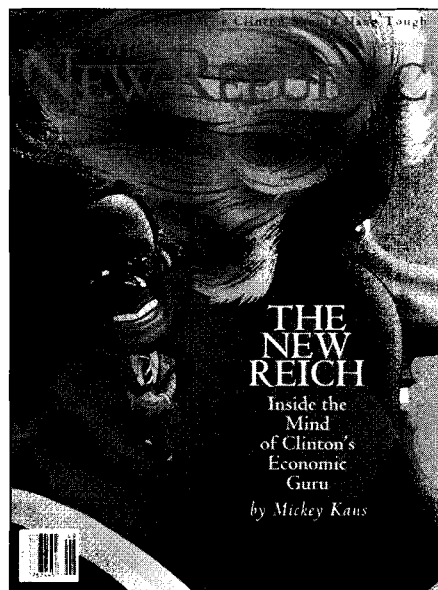
To the editors:

Jim Holt's thought experiment was deeper in its implications, I think, than even Holt sees. It can be used to solve not only the problem of abortion, but the equally troublesome problem in our beleaguered society of murder itself.

Here's how it goes. In rural Iowa in the early 1970s, a young man is hit by a truck and taken to a hospital. After weeks in intensive care, he awakens in a state of total amnesia. Slowly, he is brought to "remember" who he was and what he was doing at the time of the accident. He picks up the thread of his life, goes to college, and pursues a career.

While the young man (let us call him "Jack Holt") was in a state of suspended consciousness, a team of Martian scientists used a cloning machine to create a double ("Jim Holt"), whom they placed in an intensive care unit in Bangor, Maine, wanting to study the manner in which "identical" human beings endowed with "identical" life histories would perform in different environments. They arrange things so that "Jim" awakes at precisely the same moment as "Jack," is helped to "remember" the same personal history, and afterward pursues an independent career.

But sometime during the period that "Jack" and "Jim" are unconscious, records get mixed up, making it impossible to tell whether "Jack" was cloned from "Jim" or "Jim" from "Jack." According to the argument of the original piece, we now have a situation in which killing either "Jack" or "Jim" with a meat ax, far from being murder or even manslaughter, will count simply as a non-event. The benefits are immediately obvious: rather than changing society or changing people such that fewer murders take place, we lower the murder rate simply by redefining the concept of "murder," so that in some cases formerly defined as murder *nothing has taken place*. It's cheap, it's easy, and it avoids the messy moral quandary that arises when one considers "Jack" and "Jim" human



individuals endowed with (even in a state of unconsciousness or amnesia) certain inalienable rights.

WILLIAM C. DOWLING
Princeton, New Jersey

Women's world

To the editors:

Christopher Lasch's patronizing misreading of Carol Gilligan's work ("Gilligan's Island," December 7) is based on an underlying accusation of essentialism, on the assumption that the gender-based distinctions Gilligan defines are absolutes rather than observed traits. So when one of Gilligan's subjects exhibits the ethics of care, Lasch retorts, "Unfortunately for Gilligan's hypothesis of a 'different voice' in women, the speaker turns out to be a man." There is no contradiction here. Nowhere in her work does Gilligan suggest that a male body necessarily and exclusively entails a male

sense of self and development, or that a female body entails a feminine "I." Her assertion is simply that most females exhibit mainly a feminine ethical development, and vice versa.

Lasch's objection to Brown and Gilligan's study of Laurel School is also founded on an inaccurate premise, that they consider women's ethics superior to male moral development, therefore Brown and Gilligan should be surprised by adolescent girls' capacity for cruelty. On the contrary, the assertion is that female moral development is not better but different, and of value. Lasch's inability to see the complexity of gender differences is perhaps best expressed in his condemnation of the feminist "retreat" into a "little world of their own." Women's world is not little, and its exploration is no retreat.

ALISON VALTIN
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

No kidding

To the editors:

The letter by Eric Rasmusen (Correspondence, November 23) arguing against measles immunization contains an analytic flaw of gigantic proportions. Using the figure of 25,000 cases per year and thirty-five deaths per year as the cases that would be prevented at a cost of \$60 million is a serious mistake, since these are the cases that occur in spite of the current vaccination efforts. To estimate the benefit of the vaccine, measles incidence rates prior to 1960 would have to be used. Then, 500,000 cases a year were reported, with many more cases being unreported, and fatalities were nearly 500 per year.

The vaccine has dramatically reduced the number of cases and deaths. One of the primary purposes of the vaccine program is to achieve high enough levels of immunity in the population to produce "herd immunity" to prevent epidemics from occurring. If we use the pre-1960 figures in a similar superficial analysis (and do not even correct for population increase, unreported cases, or the costs of treating illness and complications), we still get an entirely different picture. Let us suppose that it is worth \$100 to prevent each reported case that has been prevented, which would justify a cost of \$50 million per year. This leaves \$10 million to prevent the 500 deaths. Is it worth spending \$20,000 a year for each life saved? Absolutely. It is good politics, good economics, and correct mathematics.

DENNIS R. SWANSON, M.D.
Health Director
Danville Health Department
Danville, Virginia

TRB[®]

FROM WASHINGTON

The Prune Book

Now that our triumph over communism is complete, the next goal is to spread American-style democracy throughout the world. In a place like Somalia, to take a lively example, it is obviously no good to have the country run by nothing but a bunch of warlords. That is a recipe for anarchy. Oh, there is nothing wrong with warlords per se. But to do things right, American-style, you need Warlords, Deputy Warlords, Executive Warlords, Executive Deputy Warlords, Confidential Assistants to the Executive Deputy Warlords, etc.

My text for this sermon on the proper way to run a democracy is that Government Printing Office best seller, *United States Government: Policy and Supporting Positions* (211 pages; \$13), a.k.a. "the Plum Book." This is the publication put out every four years, right after the presidential election, listing all the jobs available for the new president to fill at his or her discretion.

At first glance, taken as literature, the Plum Book is disappointing. Job titles like "Confidential Assistant to the Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture" lack the forthright glamour of, say, "warlord" (so impressive on one's business card). At the same time, they also lack the mystery and romance of some British government sinecures such as "Lord Privy Seal" or "Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster." The U.S. Treasury Department has a few swashbuckling "assayers," and State has its "attachés," but by and large the American job titles don't get much more lyrical than "commissioner, Inter-American Tropical Tuna commission" (one of two separate tuna-related posts that are in the president's gift).

Missing too are all the folks who loom so large in the government as portrayed in the media. Where are all the "senior administration officials" and "trusted aides" who fill the daily newspapers with their anonymous pronouncements?

However, the Plum Book takes on a certain incantatory power when treated as poetry and read aloud. Repeat af-

ter me (from the Commerce Department chapter):

General Counsel
Senior Counsel to the General Counsel
Confidential Assistant
Counsellor to the General Counsel
Deputy General Counsel
Assistant General Counsel ...
Chief Counsel ...
Deputy Chief Counsel ...

Subtle changes are rung as the verse moves from department to department. The equivalent passage from the Department of Health and Human Services begins:

General Counsel
Principal Deputy General Counsel
Deputy General Counsel—Legal Counsel
Special Assistant to the General Counsel
Deputy General Counsel
Chief Counsel ...

The Plum Book may also be read as a giant literary puzzle. Hours can be spent deconstructing the text in pursuit of status codes. It's easy enough to comprehend the basic hierarchy of adjectives in which Associate trumps Assistant and Deputy trumps Associate and so on. "Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary" is clearly superior to "Special Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Secretary," even though the latter arguably is more euphonious.

But the rococo variations and permutations can offer challenges. Is a Special Assistant higher or lower than a Confidential Assistant? Where does an Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary—of which there are at least seven at Treasury—stand compared with a Deputy Under Secretary/Assistant Secretary? When the same department boasts a Deputy Assistant Secretary (Policy Analysis) and a Director, Office of Policy Analysis, which one's analysis has a better chance of becoming policy?

And what do you make of Treasury, which has a Deputy Secretary and an Under Secretary and an Executive Secretary—each with the usual retinue of assistants and associates? Who lords it over whom in the Secretary's dining room?

The deeper mystery, of course, is what do all these people do. Let us not indulge in the cheap Republican presumption that anyone working in the federal bureaucracy must be a self-serving time waster. (Most of the jobs in the 1992 Plum Book, after all, are currently filled by Republicans.) But the job titles give little indication of what the holder's duties are and how much, if anything, he or she is contributing to the commonweal.

Job seekers (the Plum Book's main customers) will find this frustrating. Suppose that, inspired by Bill Clinton's campaign promises, you long to be the guy who gets

to throw welfare mothers off the dole after two years. Is that person the Assistant to the President for Economic and Domestic Policy? The Counsellor to the President for Domestic Policy? The Manager of Special Initiatives of the Department of Health and Human Services? The Assistant Secretary of HHS for Children and Families? The Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training?

Would-be Clintonistas are perusing the Plum Book like a Christmas catalog, visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads. But very few of the jobs listed sound like sure-fire fun. One I spotted that looked promising was Presidential Diarist (in the National Archives and Records Administration). It comes, naturally, with an Assistant to the Presidential Diarist.

At the very least, it's hard not to suspect grotesque title inflation: too many Chief Counsels and not enough Indian Counsels. One's heart goes out to the poor woman at the State Department who seems to be the only person in the entire government whose title is listed as the brutally frank "Secretary (Typing)." Are her duties so very different from the "Correspondence Officer" in her same office? Her only consolation is that in the government, unlike the private sector, "Secretary" is also an honorific. Perhaps to avoid confusion, Lawrence Eagleburger should be identified as "Secretary (No Typing)."

The government is very big on liaison. At the White House, there are two Deputy Assistants to the President for Public Liaison as well as a Special Assistant to the President for Public Liaison and another Deputy Assistant who is also Director, Office of Public Liaison. All fair enough, perhaps, in a democracy. But the Commerce Department has a ten-person office of *White House Liaison*—a Deputy Assistant Secretary, four Special Assistants, and five Confidential Assistants—which seems a bit much. Why should an administration need so many people to liaise with itself?

Clinton has promised to prune the federal bureaucracy. He might well take this document as his Prune Book, though there will always be people ready to explain why we need an International Development and Cooperation Agency as well as an Agency for International Development. Indeed, Clinton's only bureaucratic foray so far has been to add a new National Economic Council to the already existing Council of Economic Advisers and Office of Management and Budget, not to mention the entire Treasury Department and economics divisions of the other Cabinet departments. Look for Confidential Assistant to the Executive Assistant to the Associate Director of the NEC in the 1996 edition.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

JANUARY 4 & 11, 1993

MANDATE FOR CHANGE?

Watching a president-elect conduct an economics seminar with the aplomb that Bill Clinton did this past week is a sweet experience. For the first time since John Kennedy, we will have a president whose intellectual skills do not distance him from the art of governance, but actually bring him closer. The only problem is that his first batch of important appointments suggests that we'll need all the presidential acumen we can get.

Sure, there were some smart picks: Leon Panetta as head of the budget office, Robert Reich as secretary of labor, Carol Browner as head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Panetta has the only qualification for the Office of Management and Budget that really matters: he's a deficit hawk. Reich is an imaginative thinker in the field of worker training and retraining, where we badly lag behind our European and Japanese competitors. If he gets a chance to enact some of his ideas, Reich may turn the Labor Department into more than the bureaucratic backwater it is now. Curiously, most of the media, which like to classify the Clintonites as either left- or right-wing, have cast Reich as a "liberal." In fact, Reich is rightly interested in thinking beyond these categories, and is more independent of union pressure than any labor secretary in modern memory. Browner has a solid record of mediating hard environmental problems in Florida, and although she's prone to green hyperbole on global warming and ozone depletion, she's a realist in the fine print. And thank heaven this was an appointment of a woman that did not seem in any way rigged to meet some insulting "diversity" criterion.

Elsewhere, though, the picture is bleaker. As we go to press, rumors are rife that Warren Christopher will be appointed secretary of state—a truly disastrous choice, emblematic both of the scant regard that the United States still pays to the conduct of foreign affairs and of Clinton's complete misreading of the foreign policy traps he'll face in the next few years. We hope it's only a rumor; it is not, unhappily, the only sign of complacency. Take Clinton's choice to head the Department of Health and Human Services, a post key to reforming our failed welfare system. Clinton had a chance to name

someone who'd break radically with the past and push his own proposal to require work after two years of welfare. He might have chosen Will Marshall or Elaine Kamarck of the Progressive Policy Institute, who co-authored the chapter on welfare reform in PPI's *Mandate for Change*. Instead he opted for Donna Shalala, whose penchant for political correctitude makes her an unlikely advocate of workfare. Indeed, welfare reform wasn't even one of the five priorities she listed at her press conference last week.

In other departments, the "change" Clinton is advocating is change for the worse. During the campaign, he backed the North American Free Trade Agreement and seemed poised to steer the Democrats away from Gephardt protectionism. But for the head of the Council of Economic Advisers, Clinton chose Berkeley economist Laura Tyson, known principally for her support of "managed" trade and heavy-handed industrial policy. Elsewhere he has simply resorted to political payback. In naming Ron Brown commerce secretary, Clinton rewards a loyal fund-raiser. But what he gets is someone who also represents the worst of Washington's influence-peddling culture. Before he became chairman of the DNC, Brown was a lobbyist for foreign dictators and corporate interests; his law partners at Patton, Boggs, & Blow were recently described on the cover of *National Journal* as "Ready to Cash in on Clinton."

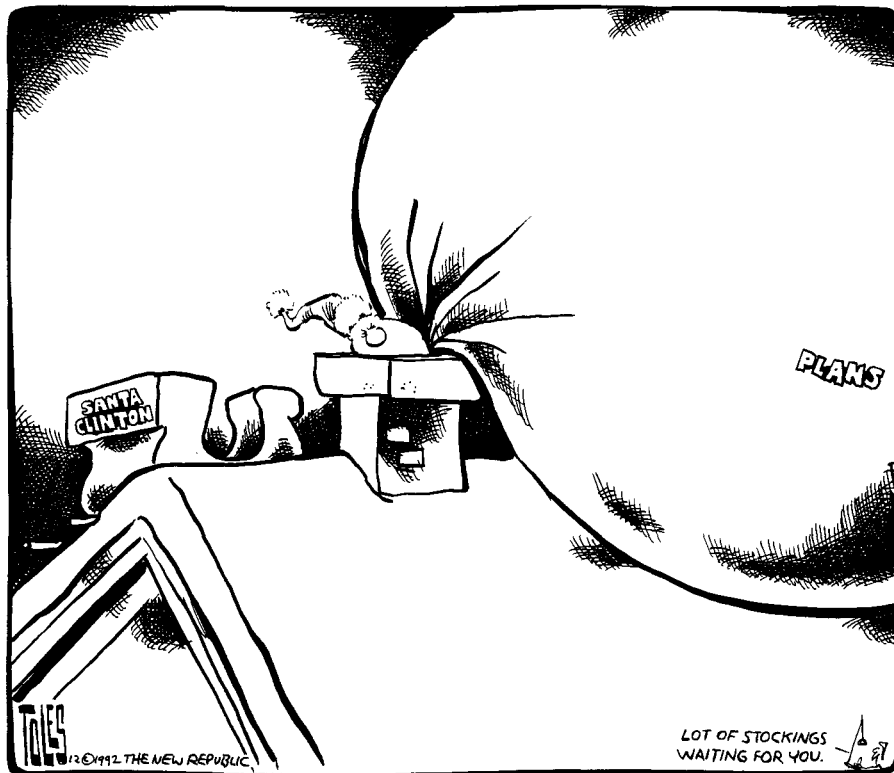


No administration is perfect, of course. And Clinton himself remains the surest defense against intellectual laziness and special-interest pandering among the ranks. To watch him bob and weave and pound his fist at the economic summit was to be reminded of why he was our candidate this year: he ran at times as an inspiring agent of change. But the forces arrayed against him—against real welfare reform, against real deficit reduction, against a smart and tough foreign policy—are mighty. And the window for unpopular action is small. With some of his appointments, Clinton has begun a process of compromise with the Washington and the Democratic establishment that may lead him far from where the voters wanted him to go. •

NOTEBOOK

NITPICKS: Judging by some of the people Bill Clinton has named to his transition team, he doesn't think someone's past ideas or actions should have any consequences in the political present. Heading the transition team cluster responsible for arts, education, labor, and the humanities (and often named as a potential secretary of education) is Johnetta B. Cole, president of Spelman College in Atlanta. Cole has been a sectarian, outspoken, and consistent spokesperson for scores of organizations affiliated with the Communist Party USA, including the U.S. Peace Council, the Venceremos Brigade, and the American Institute for Marxist Studies. After the invasion of Grenada, she co-authored a bitter diatribe for the U.S. Peace Council that described American society as "ingrained" with "anti-communism, racism, sexism, and national chauvinism," qualities Cole found absent in Grenada

under Maurice Bishop and in Cuba under Fidel Castro. In an article she wrote in 1977 for *The Black Scholar*, Cole called on black Americans to "stand in solidarity with the Cuban revolution now, [since] as we struggle for meaningful transformation of U.S. society, there is much we can learn from Cuba." The article was pure Fidelista propaganda, written in Stalinist hagiographic style, and ended endorsing the sending of Cuban troops to Angola in 1976. On June 6, 1979, Cole's name was among those in a paid ad in *The New York Times* taken out by the U.S. Peace Council attacking Joan Baez for her criticism of Communist Vietnam's torture and imprisonment of dissenters from the regime. Clinton's second most bizarre choice is that of Gary Sick, to report to him on American policy toward Iran. Sick, as readers of this magazine probably know, has spent the last couple of years as a highly paid promoter of the now totally discredited October Surprise conspiracy theory. Why Clinton would want either of these people anywhere near his government is beyond us.



THE INNER BIGOT: On CNN's "Crossfire" of December 11, radio talk show host Bill Cunningham coined a brilliant new phrase while he was defending Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott, who has been accused of making bigoted remarks about blacks and Jews. Schott, he said, was "a recovering racist individual," going on to add, "I'm saying let's help each other recover and quit pointing the finger." With these remarks, the jargon of addiction and twelve-step recovery processes has finally become an all-purpose response to accusations of criminal or immoral action. Bob Packwood? A recovering sexual-harassment addict. Saddam Hussein?

A recovering authoritarian.

CHRISTMAS IN WASHINGTON: "A bullet struck a Secret Service van parked outside a federal building where President Bush was watching a holiday program, but officials believe the bullet was a stray from a shooting unrelated to the president. Mr. Bush and his wife, Barbara, along with Vice President Dan Quayle,

were inside the National Building Museum for the taping of NBC's 'Christmas in Washington' on Sunday night when a Secret Service agent inside the van heard a thud." —*The New York Times*, December 15

WHY WE'RE REALLY IN SOMALIA: Finally, the paranoid interpretation of the U.S. mission in Somalia. Mohammed Abdulkadir Nur, a spokesman for Al-Itixad, one of Somalia's Muslim fundamentalist parties, told Paul Quinn-Judge of the *Boston Globe* that the United States came not to feed the country, but to establish a puppet regime in order to fight the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. "The U.S. believes that Islam is a disease and has to be stopped wherever it appears," Nur said.

YULETIDE CHEER: This Christmas, more than 200 Haitians will celebrate a year in captivity at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. They are an unfortunate

group. Almost all have been found eligible for asylum in the United States on the grounds that they are likely to be persecuted on return to Haiti. But because most of them have also tested positive for HIV, they are being held in legal limbo at a U.S. prison camp. Conditions at the camp are desperate: two Haitians tried to commit suicide last month. Now at least fifteen of the refugees have contracted full-blown AIDS, and camp doctors are urging the Bush administration to let them into the United States for treatment. But the Immigration and Naturalization Service has refused. "They're going to die anyway, aren't they?" says INS spokesman Duke Austin. Bill Clinton has promised to change the Bush policy of excluding all HIV-positive refugees and sending all newly indicted Haitians back to their persecutors. Unfortunately, the sickest Haitians may not be able to wait until January 20. President Bush's intransigence now looks gratuitously cruel; he can afford to let a handful of refugees into the United States before it is too late.

AND IF THAT FAILS, TRACK DOWN AN ESKIMO: "It was unclear if Judge Wald's decision to remove her name from the list [for attorney general] would cause Mr. Clinton to broaden the search beyond the remaining women to include some black men." —*The New York Times*, December 16

BOOKNOTE: We are pleased to announce the publication, by New Republic Books, of *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of the Republics* by Hélène Carrère D'Encausse.

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR: This is our Christmas double issue, and TNR will not appear next week. The editors will be watching C-SPAN reruns of the economic summit. •

BAIDOA POSTCARD

THE HUNGER

By Lawrence B. Salander

Baïdoa is a provincial town approximately 120 miles west of Mogadishu. The pre-famine population of this godforsaken place is anyone's guess. I've read figures that range from 40,000 to 60,000. There are more people than that here now. The place is teeming with refugees who have made their way here because they have heard that it is better. Better than what?

You don't see many young children in Baidoa, because most of them are dead. One report commissioned by the United Nations estimates that 71 percent of the children of Baidoa under 5 years old have died. The accuracy of the figure is debatable, but whatever the true number, it is clearly horrific. And it's not as though these kids are dying from anything exotic. The two biggest killers are diarrhea and the measles. The medicine and food they need sits in storage in Mogadishu.

Rancid, disease-carrying water. Life in a six-foot-square grass-covered hut, home to eight people. Mothers and fathers driven mad by the hopelessness of their situation, watching their children die. Many of them seem to refuse to believe it, and carry on as if everything were normal. Human feces are everywhere, and swarms of flies surround the children not yet sick enough to be out of pain, their hair turned orange by malnutrition before falling out in clumps. Many have silver-dollar-size oozing sores caused by a lice-like animal that bores through their skin to the bone. These children with their distended stomachs, half-naked and filthy. Each one coughing a death cough.

I traveled here under the auspices of CARE. With machine-gun fire as background music, one of the organization's employees, Mary Jane Hammond, who for the last several months has been a resident of Baidoa, began what seemed to be a daily exercise with these kids. Surrounded by thirty or forty of them, she started to count to ten, out loud in English. The children picked up the count. When they reached ten they all gave themselves a round of applause, and then all of them broke into the most wonderful smiles—made larger, it seemed, by their emaciated faces. The few optimistic moments in Baidoa clearly defined the almost unbearable misery. Death was not the worst of it.

I went to the "hospital" to visit the dying. As terrible as it was, it was almost a relief to see these kids out of pain. It's their parents who need our compassion. Two dark and damp ten-by-twenty-foot adjoining rooms serve as the "pediatric ward." Each room contains seven or eight beds—wooden platforms that two children often share. One mother pointed out her dying infant, who was too small to see at first. She searched my eyes for the hope I could not give her. A father took my arm and led me to the bed where his 5-year-old boy lay moments from death. He pulled back the cover to show me the boy's dissipated body, and then took my hand and placed it on what was left of his son's stomach.

We climbed back into our Jeep-like vehicle, with a crew of "security men" hired for the day by CARE. A 15-year-old manned the machine gun on the roof while two other riflemen rode shotgun. The driver was the boss, the oldest and the biggest. They were high from chewing *khat* all day. The next stop was the airstrip, and the man was in a hurry to get there. Moving targets must be harder to hit. The dust was flying as people scattered to avoid us. A young boy made a run for it, to join his friends across the street. The driver hit the brakes, and the kid froze. We missed him by inches.

This thug, the driver, got out of the car with a bamboo stick and chased the boy down. He hit him twice. I turned away in rage and disgust. But then I realized that this single, barbaric act was the most hopeful thing I'd seen all day. This guy was beating the child to teach him to be more careful. And that implies a belief in tomorrow, which in Baidoa is no small thing.

LAWRENCE B. SALANDER is a painter and art dealer in New York.

India's mosque massacre.

UNHOLY RAO

By *Sunil Sethi*

NEW DELHI

No one in India should have been surprised by what happened on December 6 in the northern city of Ayodhya. An armed mob of 200,000 Hindu fundamentalists tore down a 464-year-old Muslim mosque, precipitating riots in a dozen or so Indian cities and the deaths of more than 1,000 people. Hindus have long claimed that the site of the mosque is rightly theirs. The Bharatiya Janata Party—which has led the movement to remove the mosque and replace it with a Hindu temple—has taken responsibility for the demolition. But in good Indian fashion the recriminations echo on, as the BJP accuses the Congress Party of pandering to the Muslims, and Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao claims the BJP lied to him and to Parliament about its real aims in Ayodhya.

All of this is just the latest twist in a muddled, often scary story about how both parties have used religious interests to further their political ends. Most of the time, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs in India have managed to get along quite peacefully. But as Indira Gandhi showed, the temptation to goad their bigotries is sometimes too politically useful to resist. In Gandhi's era, the fights were largely restricted to Punjab and Kashmir. Today they're national. Since 1986 leaders in both the Congress Party and the BJP have managed to bring Hindus and Muslims to a peak of mutual loathing.

The rise of the present wave of fundamentalist politics doesn't date back to some momentous turning point, but to a piffling divorce case in 1985, in which an elderly Muslim woman demanded alimony. The court ordered her ex-husband to pay, and orthodox Muslims, viewing the decision as a violation of the *sharia*, raised an alarm. Although India's secular constitution guarantees minorities the right to observe their own religious law (to the distaste of the Hindu majority), this case sought settlement in accordance with the common civil code.

Rajiv Gandhi was prime minister at the time; after his mother's assassination, he had an absolute majority in Parliament. His eyes fastened on Muslim votes, and he overturned the court judgment and amended the law with an act of Parliament in 1986. This appeased Muslim conservatives, but liberals and Hindu conservatives were outraged. So Gandhi's cousin, Arun Nehru, then interior minister, attempted to calm Hindu sentiment in the politically crucial state of Uttar Pradesh by unlocking the doors of the mosque at Ayodhya and allowing members of the Hindu right wing to perform a foundation ceremony for their temple.

In a country where obscure religious gestures and arcane symbols drive the votes of a poor and ignorant majority, the move opened the floodgates of Hindu fundamentalism. The political advantage, though, didn't go to Gandhi's Congress Party, but to the BJP. Up to that point the BJP had been an opposition fringe party with no future. It had no perceptible political agenda, and its squeaky-voiced leader, L. K. Advani, though a seasoned politician, was known as "the soft-spoken hard-liner." The party's following was restricted to pockets of urban middle-class traders; it had no influence in the hinterland.

The BJP is really a political front for an array of extremist social and religious organizations. Its chief backer, a group called the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, or the National Volunteer Force, was founded in 1925 by K. B. Hegdevar, an activist with a vision of pan-Hindu revival. He exhorted his uniformed followers, like Hitler's Brown Shirts, to meet every day for ritual drills, discourses, and salutes to the motherland. No one is quite sure how many affiliates the RSS has spawned since; there could be as many as eighty. The crucial one, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council, was formed in 1964 with the purpose of reconverting 3,000 mosques, built by Muslim rulers of India, into Hindu temples.

Advani shrewdly saw his opportunity in Ayodhya. Since 1989 he has undertaken exhaustive cross-country road tours, usually before an election, to whip up Hindu fervor and carry on his campaign to reclaim the mosque. His efforts, and those of the VHP, had the desired result: in the elections between 1984 and 1991 the number of BJP seats in Parliament shot up from two to 178 out of 544, making it the most powerful opposition party. This year, rejecting its policy of nurturing a committed cadre force, the BJP opened its ranks to new membership. The number jumped from 3.5 million to 9.5 million, mostly wild-eyed followers, illiterate or unemployed, parading as "holy workers" in saffron robes.

In 1990 Advani's journey atop a motorized pasteboard chariot urging followers to gather in Ayodhya met with a frenzied response. Advani was arrested before his arrival; riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims, and hundreds were killed. Four such campaigns have been conducted, each time with Advani's promise to reclaim the sacred ground. It was unrealistic to think

that the fundamentalists would arrive this time in Ayodhya and not get the temple. Nevertheless, against the frantic advice of Cabinet colleagues, Rao dithered as the mob began to gather, refusing to send in armed troops or to act in any way to avert disaster.

Rao has paid a high price for his indecisiveness. He is now being pressed even harder by his party to take tougher measures against the BJP. If he does not do so, his colleagues may well unseat him. At the same time, the Congress Party cannot ignore the demands of the increasingly mighty and extreme fundamentalist opposition. Rao has jailed some of the BJP's top leaders for joining in the mosque destruction, and the party may be temporarily subdued. Nevertheless, the BJP is now a central force in Indian politics, ineluctably changing the fragile accommodation between Hindus and Muslims on the subcontinent. There will doubtless be quite a few Ayodhyas to come.

SUNIL SETHI is a syndicated columnist in India.

South Africa's theme park.

DINOSAURLAND

By Richard Stengel

BOPHUTHATSWANA, SOUTH AFRICA

In Xanadu did Kublai Khan a stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round . . .

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Little did Kublai Khan know that he was creating the first fantasy theme resort. South African developer Sol Kerzner, whose literary allusions run less to Coleridge than to Sidney Sheldon (who was here to judge the Miss World contest), has created his own \$300 million Xanadu on eighty arid acres in the bantustan of Bophuthatswana. Named the Lost City, the theme of the resort is that it was built many centuries ago by a tribe of environmentally correct and spiritually pure aesthetes. Buried by a volcano sometime during the Dark Ages, the city was recently discovered and lovingly excavated. Like Khan's Xanadu, Kerzner's creation teems with sacred rivers and royal temples. And like Xanadu, it is a fabulous work of fiction, for nothing in it is real.

Kerzner, who used to describe himself as the Donald Trump of Southern Africa (when Trump was flush), started Sun International, which developed and owns the gambling resort Sun City in Bophuthatswana, of which

the Lost City is now the crown jewel. Sun City boasts 1.5 million visitors a year, and Kerzner hopes that the Lost City will boost that figure to nearly 3 million. Kerzner also controls thirty other hotels, most of which are casino-resorts in the quasi-independent South African homelands, surviving relics of the apartheid system.

A gruff troll of a man, Sol, as everyone calls him, is the ambitious son of Russian immigrants to Johannesburg. After studying accounting at the University of Witwatersrand (where he was welterweight boxing champ), he bought his first hotel in Durban in 1959 when he was 23. Today Kerzner bustles around like a stocky wind-up toy, never without a set of silver worry beads that he obsessively fingers throughout his seventeen-hour work days.

Next to a handful of politicians like F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, Sol may be the nation's biggest celebrity. Kerzner knows that self-promotion, even more than money, is the currency of our time. He employs almost as many p.r. people as he does construction workers. (Journalists arriving at the Lost City are proffered a package of p.r. material—in the form of a marbled cardboard tome—that weighs five pounds.) For the past month you could not turn on the television or open a newspaper without seeing a story lionizing Kerzner and his Lost City. The South African Broadcast Company recently aired two hour-long documentaries on Kerzner and the Lost City that were produced by Kerzner's p.r. staff.

Kerzner's Lost City has functioned like a dose of Prozac for South Africa's anxious white minority. White South Africans endlessly complain that the world pays attention to all the wrong things—apartheid—and never notices the good things, such as the fact that South African blacks have the highest per capita income among blacks on the continent. But mostly they fret that foreigners don't consider them or their achievements "world-class." For weeks Kerzner and his worshipful flacks have been referring to the Lost City as a "world-class" resort. As he put it on SABC: "We've had the top media of the world here, and I'll tell you, they're not so easily impressed. In terms of theme, total concept, in world terms, it's the best."

I drove up for the gala opening of the Lost City, a trip of about 100 miles from Johannesburg. Passing through the dry moonscape of Bophuthatswana, you pass acres of the familiar ramshackle tin shanties. When you first glimpse the Lost City, it rises up from the bushveld like some vast movie set. The main building, the 338-room Palace Hotel, is a mélange of architectural styles: Romanesque arches, Moorish towers, Byzantine mosaics. Giant sculpted antelope heads form flying buttresses for the hotel's twin towers, which are topped by cupolas seemingly constructed out of elephant tusks. Sweeping, phallic elephant tusks are ubiquitous in the Lost City: from the crossed tusks in the elevators to elephant-tusk pencils in the rooms. With friezes of ancient animals on a faux rock wall, the main casino could be the Caves of Lascaux with craps tables. The Bridge of Time, linking the casino to the hotel, is riddled with

phony hairline cracks. The rocks, like the elephant tusks, are made from welded steel and wire mesh, sprayed with cement, and covered with fiberglass. It is the Magical Realism school of architecture.

Spreading out from the back of the hotel is a grand fan-shaped pool with surfable, six-foot-high waves breaking on an ersatz white beach. Water flows into the "Royal Baths" from an "Endless River" and feeds five different water slides (South Africans dote on water slides), including the "Temple of Courage," the centerpiece slide with a frightening 250-foot drop. The hotel is also surrounded by a sixty-acre jungle, which features a rain forest, a desert, and a swamp. To create his designer jungle, Kerzner imported 1.6 million plants and shrubs, including a forty-eight-ton Baobab tree from the Eastern Transvaal. While I was admiring the tree, a safari-suited gardener triumphantly informed me that the *Guinness Book of World Records* recently declared it to be the largest transplanted tree in the world.

On the afternoon of the opening night I traipsed around the grounds, mainly observing South African journalists snapping pictures of each other in various scenic venues: a leggy reporter for the *Pretoria News* leaned fetchingly against the trunk of a twenty-five-foot statue of Shwenu the elephant. Bands of ordinary South Africans inspected their new national treasure, including a dazzled computer expert from Pretoria who told me, "We're not off the bloody map yet, man." It was hard not to notice that the managers were all white and the low-level staff all black. The white managers were dressed in black tie, whereas every black worker seems to be in costume. The black doormen were clad in flowing robes and jeweled turbans; the black cleaning ladies sported brightly colored dashikis with matching sashes. The black waiters at the tusk bar were arrayed in leopard-print vests. The theme seemed to be that the natives should look, well, *native*.

For opening night, Kerzner brought in Jean Michel Jarre, the French artist who orchestrates sound and light shows on a grand scale. Kerzner also imported a Madame Tussaud's gallery of celebrity second-raters led by Billy Dee Williams, Joan Collins, Brigitte Nielsen, and Ivana Trump, who wowed the locals by ordering two Remy Martin Louis XIII cognacs at \$200 a pop.

The press, in a special viewing area, were plied with free drinks and a buffet of South African delicacies. Mingling among us were the eighty-three contestants from the Miss World contest. The girls were shielded from randy German tabloid photographers by their chaperones. But I did manage to chat with Miss USA, Sharon Belden, a perky, cheerleader type who told me she was studying Interior Yacht Design in Ft. Lauderdale. When I ambushed her with a question about the political situation in South Africa, she replied, "Every country has its problems." The contestants were forbidden from leaving the Lost City or even from buying newspapers. Miss Croatia, who was wearing a sequined minidress on her six-foot frame, said, "I feel like prisoner."

The true model for Kerzner is probably not Kublai Khan but Bugsy Siegel, the L.A. mobster who had a vision of leisure-suited Americans drinking and gambling in the Nevada desert. (Last September Sol became the first non-American elected to the Las Vegas Gambling Hall of Fame.) Kerzner too has had some legal problems. The government of the Transkei applied for his extradition after he admitted under oath that he had bribed the former head of the homeland with more than half a million dollars in order to acquire its exclusive gaming rights. "I have a very clear conscience on the Transkei issue," Kerzner declared on T.V. "I gained nothing financially." But he knows that in the new South Africa the homelands will probably wither away, and he is taking steps to protect his holdings. Although Kerzner has reportedly bestowed huge sums upon Nationalist Party politicians in order to get Parliament to ban gambling in the Republic while retaining it in the homelands, he has also made overtures to the ANC. Kerzner recently provided his Johannesburg mansion to the ANC for an opulent reception and is rumored to be close to ANC foreign affairs chief Thabo Mbeki.

On opening night, 20,000 ordinary South Africans paid \$35 each to go to the Jarre *son-et-lumière* show, which bathed the Palace and the surrounding hills with zebra stripes, dancing suns, and pseudo-African drawings. To me, it looked like Peter Max crossed with Keith Haring accompanied by New Age music. I did hear some grumbling on the way out—but about the show, not the city. The city, everyone agreed, was "world class." Late in the show (before a loin-clothed black man hit a great gong to signal the end), a small brush fire broke out on the hillside where Jarre was projecting his images. No one in the audience knew whether it was part of the presentation or an accident. "It's just one more example of fantasy becoming reality," said one of Sol's clever publicists.

RICHARD STENGEL is the author of *January Sun: One Day, Three Lives, A South African Town* (Simon and Schuster).

The Torquemada complex of bank regulators.

KILLER NERDS

By Michael Lewis

A few months ago the *Baltimore Evening Sun* published the anguished cry of a man whose most deeply held assumptions had been shattered. Since 1972 James L. Fisher, a former president of Towson State University, had served on the board of directors of Baltimore Federal Savings & Loan. When

the S&L failed in 1988 the federal government slapped Fisher with a \$32 million lawsuit alleging gross negligence. Fisher was stunned. "I had read materials, listened to experts, participated in discussions, and attended monthly meetings in good faith," he wrote. Unable to afford legal fees of \$14,000 a month, he now spends his time researching his own defense. "And so at the age of 61," he wrote, "and after a lifetime laced with volunteer public service, I am disillusioned, my life threatened by an irrational creature of government that may not be checked in time to save me."

Not many of us are likely to shed a tear for Fisher's Cheeveresque plight. Since 1980 about 200 banks and savings and loans have collapsed every year, compared with about five a year between 1945 and 1980. Sure, he doesn't seem to be the sort of hail-felon-well-met one associates with the collapsing banking industry—he hadn't used the bank's money to decorate his pool room or to fly the Oklahoma Symphony to Dallas to play at his daughter's wedding. Sure, he might merely have had a little too much faith in the chief executive. But the bank *did* fail. Fisher's job was to make sure that the boss wasn't messing things up. The point of the laws passed by Congress over the last few years is to drive this lesson home. Suing a couple of thousand of directors of failed banks sends a message to the others that they'd better start taking their duties seriously.

Sadly, the crushing of James L. Fisher may not do the trick. Sending out a posse after bank directors might sat-

isfy the public's craving for retributive justice. But the excessive focus on a few individuals ignores why the banking and S&L problems have occurred in the first place. As a result, the prosecution of men like Fisher is unlikely to ease the fiscal crisis, recover the squandered money, or keep banks from collapsing in the future. Just the reverse.

The first problem with the current policy of squeezing the pips till they squeak is the mysterious process by which the government decides who is and isn't sued. One would assume that prosecutors go after directors who were willfully negligent rather than those who merely committed honest errors of judgment. But the regulators don't seem overly concerned with the distinction. A recent article in *Forbes* reported the case of Richard Blair, a director of the McLean Savings & Loan in Virginia, who is being sued for negligence. At the time that Blair was allegedly rubberstamping bad loans—in a typical three-hour monthly meeting, bank directors might vote to approve four loans—he was comatose in a hospital.

An even stranger negligence suit, for \$28 million, was brought against a man named Lawrence Brown, employed to appraise real estate by a subsidiary of Pacific Savings Bank. There were two holes in the case. First, four of the six of Brown's allegedly negligent appraisals were made after the loan, i.e., they had nothing to do with the decision to lend. And second, the court concluded that there was no evidence that Brown had even



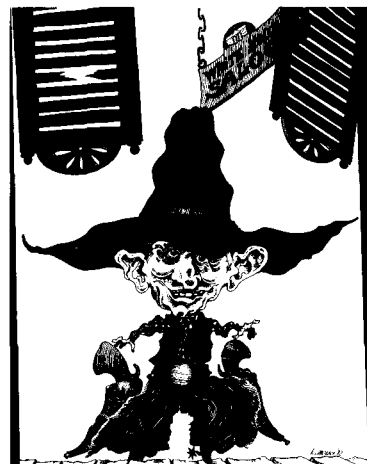
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made the appraisals. (He died before he could say.) Not surprisingly, in several cases the courts have fined the regulators for bringing abusive cases.

A perhaps more typical case currently working its way through the courts shows how difficult it is in practice to distinguish misjudgment from negligence. It is a suit against the National Bank of Washington, which failed spectacularly in 1990, exactly two blocks from the main offices of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The FDIC is suing nine of NBW's directors for negligence, chiefly over a \$10 million bad loan the bank made in 1987 to the law firm Finley Kumble. In applying for its loan, the law firm suckered the directors with fraudulent financial information. The lawsuit is demanding the amount of the loan, with interest, saying that the directors of the bank should have sensed the peril in lending to Finley Kumble. How, it doesn't say.

The case is particularly interesting because three large New York banks had also loaned Finley Kumble a total of \$70 million in 1987, within weeks of the NBW loan. But none of the directors of the other banks is being sued, because the banks haven't failed. Odder still, the government is suing only nine of the twenty-one directors of NBW, when all twenty-one voted to make the loan to the law firm. For reasons undisclosed by the FDIC, the other twelve—including Brent Scowcroft—are being let off the hook. The chosen nine seem to have nothing in common except their bad luck.

Among them is Coleman Raphael, a former dean of the business school at George Mason University, who by all accounts was the most diligent of the twenty-one outside directors. "Coleman was the definition of the conscientious director," says an observer who sat in on all the board meetings and is neither a friend nor a party to any aspect of the lawsuit. "When loan officers would come in with a proposal, they used to wince when they saw him. He'd take it apart, and put it back together." Raphael voted twice with the minority to reject the chief executive's pay package. He says he questioned closely the loan to Finley Kumble, and the government doesn't deny it. Either rectitude or sheer idiocy has led him to reject the proposal by the FDIC to settle out of court for about \$100,000; already he has spent \$70,000 of his own money on legal fees. He intends to make the case the subject of an ethics course he teaches at George Mason.

The injustice of some of the government's cases against bank directors suggests a second, larger problem: bank directors aren't very much to blame for the industry's problems. The mess for which the government now sanctimoniously holds bankers responsible was largely created by the government itself. The halfhearted attempt during the Reagan years to free the banks from government interference now looks to an outsider more like a kind of sting operation designed to nail the bankers.

For example, in 1981 Congress passed a new set of real estate tax laws that made all sorts of previously unprofitable ventures suddenly viable. The next year Congress passed laws that allowed banks to double the amount of

the loans they made against commercial real estate, from 20 percent of their assets to 40 percent, and to extend those loans on much looser terms. Over the next four years both banks and S&Ls—freed by deposit insurance from the sobering influence of the market—funded beautiful new skylines in every American city. Then in 1986—gotcha!—Congress once again overhauled the tax laws, causing the real estate market, with the banks, to collapse.

The connection between the legislation and the disaster is one of the few things that is clear about the banking crisis. For example, seventy-five out of the seventy-seven bad real estate loans that sank the First Republic Bank of Texas when it failed in July 1988 would have been illegal under the banking rules as they were before 1982.

The government's sloppy bounty hunt isn't just misguided and insubstantial (the operation will probably net only about \$1 billion of the several hundred billions it will cost to bail out the banks). It actually aggravates the financial wound it seeks to heal. The cryptic logic of the regulators has spooked sitting bank loan officers and directors. For the first time in twenty-seven years, banks have put more of their money in government securities than in commercial loans. "Fear of personal exposure to liability often leads bankers to say no to creditworthy borrowers seeking to finance creditworthy projects," wrote Timothy Ryan, the retiring director of the Resolution Trust Corporation, in *The Wall Street Journal* in November. "The age-old character loan is a thing of the past. It is increasingly difficult for a banker to give a good customer more time to work out a problem loan. This attitude hurts every community."

What's more, the seeming randomness of some of the hits on bank directors deters able people from enlisting in the cause of saving the banks. Banks and savings and loans are already at a disadvantage in attracting shrewd, knowledgeable people to serve on their boards. The sort of person able to judge a good loan from a bad loan—a good risk from a bad risk—would be far better paid and far more highly respected elsewhere: on Wall Street or in the various non-bank banks that have sprung up as the banking industry has become inefficient. The mean compensation for a bank director is somewhere between \$2,000 and \$6,000 a year, plus a free checking account. Few people, it seems, consider that adequate pay for the risk of being set up as a whipping boy for the feds. It was just this calculation that led David Thomas, founder of Wendy's and all-around commercial genius, to decline a recent invitation from a bank board. A half-dozen banking lawyers told me that they now advise clients, no matter how qualified, to avoid service on the boards of all but the very soundest banks. "No one in his right mind would take the job," said one, suggesting that several troubled banks will soon be left to a collection of fools.

Even if the vast majority of the cases brought by the regulators are justified—as they probably are—the policy of hounding directors seems hugely counterproductive. One doubts it will even restore accountability; at best, it transfers accountability into the bowels of the FDIC, where the employees seem chiefly concerned with

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being hauled before a wrathful Congress and humiliated on national television. I had naively assumed that, because they were paid by you and me, the people who oversee the unraveling of the banking system would happily submit to a few interviews, and perhaps even show a reporter around their offices. Alas, not. "I'll give you information," said the man reluctantly shoved out in front by the FDIC press office. "But the information you get from me is not from me, it's not even from a government official." It's enough to make you long for the bold individualism of bankers. •

Clinton and gays.

HOMOPHILIAC

By Adam Nagourney

The reporter who spent more time with Bill Clinton than did any other on the campaign was Mark Miller, 29, of *Newsweek*. Miller, who was granted enormous access in order to report *Newsweek's* postelection campaign wrap-up, is openly gay—and Clinton knows it. In Las Vegas a year ago, Miller, Clinton, and several aides, including George Stephanopoulos, were being driven by a Nevada state trooper. Someone in the car pointed out an attractive woman on the street. While others agreed, Miller said: "Not bad. I wonder if she has a brother?" The state trooper's head spun around; Clinton burst out laughing. "Clinton tells that story all the time," Miller says now. "He thinks it's one of the funniest things."

As is now generally acknowledged, this election was a landmark for the visibility of homosexuals in American politics. But now the prospects for gay progress are dimmer. The new administration, having opened ties with a fractious gay movement, finds that it has taken on more than it bargained for. Already there are tremors of gay discontent and division over the compromises of power. Clinton has softened his pledge to repeal the military's gay ban, now saying he'll appoint a committee to study how to implement it. (Gay activists suspect he'll try to phase it in, and exempt soldiers in close-quarter combat situations.) Similarly, his aides say the first twenty-seven jobs that his transition committee is aiming to fill do not include an AIDS czar, despite the stress Clinton placed on it during the campaign. And of the first sixty-seven appointments Clinton made to his transition team, there were no open homosexuals. "Am I concerned? Yeah," says Bob Hattoy, Clinton's HIV-positive gay friend who addressed the New York convention. "Act up over it? Not yet."

Long before now, there were premonitions that caution would be Clinton's approach. He gave only one

direct speech to a gay audience in the campaign—on May 18 at a fund-raiser at the Palace Theater in Hollywood—early enough to galvanize gay money (some \$3 million), sew up a big majority of the gay vote (probably around 75 percent), and allow the gay association to fade as an electoral liability. In a late-campaign AIDS speech in New Jersey, he used the word "gay" only once and scheduled the speech so late in the day that it missed the network news. Similarly, Clinton mentioned AIDS in his convention acceptance speech only after gay supporters who obtained a leaked copy lobbied furiously for the penciled-in change.

At a campaign rally in Oregon last May, Clinton made no mention of his opposition to Proposition 9, the state measure that encouraged anti-gay discrimination. Asked about it later by a local T.V. reporter, he said he opposed the measure, a position that, given the charged climate, would have received wide local coverage had he said so at the rally. But even then he went out of his way to say that he did not back anything that "promoted the homosexual lifestyle," language similar to that being used by proposition proponents.

There are also signs that the divisions in the gay political world may allow Clinton to put distance between himself and gay issues. Over the last few years the rift in gay politics between traditional groups such as the Human Rights Campaign Fund and the radicals such as Queer Nation has widened dramatically. The established groups tend to have a conventional liberal agenda: ending the military ban, a gay civil rights law, recognition of gay families, and more AIDS funding. They're used to working for change within the system and are happy to give Clinton time to act. They worked closely with the campaign. The victory was to these groups "a vindication for gay people who have been working in traditional politics for over twenty-five years," says Urvashi Vaid, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Clinton's win has pushed them even more resolutely into the K Street mainstream. A group of gay and AIDS organizations, led by HRCF, has retained the Washington public relations firm of Ogilvy, Adams & Rinehart to help gay activists land jobs in the Clinton administration. Ogilvy has been given a \$60,000 contract to help activist job-hunters polish their job interview skills, draw up the kinds of résumés the Clinton team is looking for, and learn how to lobby the right people in the transition office. The résumés will be delivered in bulk to the transition office, said HRCF Executive Director Tim McFeeley, and will receive special attention from the two openly gay members of the transition team. But Clinton's aides say most of the names that have come in from these groups so far are notable for one thing: they're big contributors to gay organizations.

Meanwhile, Queer Nation and other radical groups are ambivalent about Clinton and find it hard to veil their contempt for the Beltway gays. The radicals tended in the primary to support Paul Tsongas, who

had talked about AIDS and gay issues from the first days of the campaign. Some voted for the Libertarian candidate because of the fact—rarely noted by mainstream activists—that Arkansas has a gay-specific anti-sodomy law that Clinton now says he opposes, but never moved to repeal. One vocal Queer Nation activist, Michael Petrelis, sent out literature during the campaign proclaiming “Clinton = Homo-Foe.” Petrelis has attacked many gay leaders, who are increasingly under siege from the fringe. NGLTF chair Vaid quit in part over pressure from radicals; Gregory King, HRCF’s spokesman, says he’s been termed a Nazi and a collaborator. Other gay moderates have been subjected to harassment from the more extreme elements on the gay left.

The left argues that the election was no unmitigated coup for gays and that more radicalism is needed for any substantive progress. To be sure, the gay vote might have helped put Clinton over the top. (Voter Research and Surveys, which did the exit survey for the four networks, says 72 percent of respondents who said they were gay voted for Clinton; 14 percent for Bush; and 14 percent for Perot. Four years ago Bush got 28 percent, compared with 49 percent for Michael Dukakis, reflecting what seems to have been a near-total defection by Republican gays.) But only 2.6 percent in this election said they were gay, up from 1 percent in 1990—not exactly a mass constituency, and confirmation of the suspicion, even among gays, that the Kinsey estimate of the gay population (10 percent) is just wrong. What’s more, the results on other gay-related measures were mixed. The Oregon measure was defeated, but in Colorado, a weaker measure, which overturned gay rights bills in Denver, Aspen, and Boulder, was passed. Gay opponents say they’ll now export this version of the law to other states.

In retrospect, the Clinton campaign was just as ambivalent about homosexuals as the candidate himself. On the one hand, it was culturally more at ease with gays than any other mainstream general election campaign for the presidency has been. Clinton Press Secretary Dee Myers, for example, is a longtime friend of Hattoy; they josh each other in the office, and she was one of the people Hattoy first turned to after he was diagnosed. On the other hand, there are still strains: some Clinton aides, notably scheduler Susan Thomases, were said to have fought against Clinton giving that pre-election AIDS speech; some tried to stop Hattoy from giving his convention speech, until Clinton himself intervened. And, apart from an old friend, David Mixner, there are no openly gay senior Clinton advisers—and even Mixner’s access is decidedly limited. A midlevel campaign aide, who became more open about his sexuality as the campaign went on—“I was transformed,” he says—still wouldn’t be named for this article in case it would complicate his efforts to land a job in the administration. His experience could soon be replicated by many others.

ADAM NAGOURNEY is White House correspondent for *USA Today*.

Boris Yeltsin—in the flesh.

RAGING BULL

By Anne McElvoy

MOSCOW

We were standing outside St. Paul’s Cathedral in London when I asked Boris Yeltsin what the highlight of his trip to Britain was. “Lunch with Queen Elizabeth the Second,” he said. He described her majesty in Russian, but for “lunch” he preferred the English word—one of a handful he has mastered. It was delivered with the luscious, heavy “L” of his native tongue to unintended comic effect. In London, Yeltsin’s last trip to the West before the Congress, he was a model visitor. He has learned much about how to handle foreign visits in the last year. He cut a dignified figure in his double-breasted suit, inclining his bearlike head toward his listeners in an attitude of attentive interest, and, according to palace sources, impressed the queen with his poise and confidence. Gone—at least during forays abroad—is the thuggish malcontent. His hair is perfectly groomed with just the merest hint of the telltale “Communist quiff”—that little bounce of hair over the forehead that was the required coiffeur of Party functionaries and never disappears no matter what other changes they succumb to. He now knows how to play to his audience.

Last week’s Congress was a nasty bump down to earth. The jaunty statesman of the London visit bore little resemblance to the sullen figure who sat watching in dismay as one vote after another fell against him. He finally led a walkout, saying that he could no longer work with such a disputatious assembly. Even that defiant gesture missed its mark. Only 200 of the 1,064 deputies walked with him.

From his throne perched high above the podium, he had had ample opportunity to survey the forces ranged against him: the excitable nationalists hankering for a Great Russia, the embittered Communists nostalgic for the superpower days of the Soviet Union, and the hard-headed Civic Union men from the military-industrial complex who do not care a fig for ideology but are anxious to hang on to the inordinate influence that has been their birthright ever since Stalin created a bloated, inefficient machine at the heart of the empire.

The most useful aid to understanding the president’s mood at such events is a pair of opera glasses. They should have pride of place on any new correspondent’s expense list because they save one the largely fruitless task of talking to Yeltsin’s coterie of

continued on page 20

Cottage Cheese

The calculation is simple: my friend Rosa Samuelovna earns a salary of 2,142 rubles a month. One kilo of cottage cheese in St. Petersburg, where she lives with her 7-year-old son, Sasha, costs 400 rubles—100 times more than it was before the market reforms started. Question: How many kilos of cottage cheese does Rosa's monthly salary buy? Answer: Five, and with the rest of the money she can afford a kilo of apples (at 140 rubles a kilo). If she had exchanged her monthly earnings into U.S. currency, she would have gotten one \$5 bill.

The Russians are struggling desperately to adapt to the free market, so before my visit I called to ask what my friends needed most. "Don't bother bringing any toilet paper," another friend, Alla Yulievna, told me. "We use very little of it these days. You see, there is not much to eat here." On the phone I thought she was simply being a little more sarcastic than usual, but by the time we arrived at her place from the airport I felt so uneasy that I decided to fast during my stay with them. At least then I would not feel that I was taking away food from them and their little daughter (and I can spare a few kilos).

Shortly after the August coup Yeltsin said of the Soviet economic system that "it is a pity this experiment was not carried out in a smaller country." Pity indeed. But now Russia is being put through another experiment—indispensable, no doubt, but which for the Russian-in-the-street means that in little more than a year rubles have fallen to the value of kopecks and pauperization is almost universal. There is something apocalyptic in a whole nation ("extending over eleven time zones," as the Soviets used to boast) suffering such a dramatic drop in its standard of living—150 million people cannot simply muddle through. Hunger does not yet threaten survival, but the food rations that Russians can afford are "too small to live on, too big to die from," as people say in countries that fiddled with a planned economy. With the exception of *biznesmieny* (former apparatchiks) and former *spekulanty* (black marketers), all Russians—from lawyers to street sweepers—are equally concerned with one thing: how to pay for the next meal.

Take Marek, a pediatric orthopedist. He had a salary of 1,300 rubles a month (equivalent to the current price of a kilo of tea), but after taking all the possible night shifts, he now gets 4,000 rubles a month (that can buy two kilos of coffee). Tania, his wife, washes floors in a computer exhibition hall and gets 2,700 rubles a month. (Her employers are entrepreneurs; thus the extravagance.) They have two children and live with Marek's parents. The two salaries were not enough: to make ends meet they sent their 4-year-old son, Jan, to a free state kindergarten, and Tania worked as a nanny for a friend's daughter for an additional 1,500 rubles a month. In January, however, the kindergarten (which went free market, following Yegor Gaidar's reforms) will begin charging 3,000 rubles a month—almost half of what Tania and Marek earn. So Tania will forfeit her nanny job to stay home with Jan, who will likely grow up without knowing the taste of butter (414 rubles a kilo) or sugar (165 rubles a kilo).

The new market economy here means not only higher prices but also the loss of perks. Irina Borisovna retired this year with a pension of 1,300 rubles a month (the cheapest pair of Russian-made shoes costs 1,700 rubles), and as a veteran of the German siege of the town in the '40s she periodically receives a kilo of beans, a kilo of peas, and a liter of olive oil. True, as chief doctor in a textile factory she never earned much, but food prices were very low—it was only a question of standing in line—and she used to take part in lotteries for industrial products. She had a lucky hand: in the last year of the USSR she won coupons for two kettles, two irons, and the Russian edition of a German fashion journal—which she bartered for a coupon for a vacuum cleaner that her daughter needed. The same year her husband, Yuli, senior inspector in a shipping enterprise, won briefs and socks in his shipping company's lottery, and their son, Arkadij, a swimming pool lifeguard, drew a nursing bra. Now lotteries are gone; workplaces no longer have the goods for which coupons could be won.

Desperate, many Russians try to adapt to the free market by turning to some sort of black- or gray-market operations. Edik, 51, is a professor of cardiology, a specialist in sports

medicine, and the author of university manuals and research papers. In addition to his job at the Academy of Medicine, he has three part-time jobs and does technical translations besides. He makes 10,000 rubles a month, not enough to support his extended family. So Edik bought three Hungarian blood pressure meters "*na levo*"—under the counter—for 100 rubles apiece, went to Poland, and sold them for \$40—almost 20,000 rubles—each. Embarrassed about his "commercial" adventure, Edik says it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but a lucrative one: in two days he earned half a year's pay.

Darina, a 1,500-ruble-a-month schoolteacher, had no such qualms. A neighbor told her recently that she can make 500 rubles on each jacket she sells for a wholesale importer (who buys them at 4,000 rubles in Vilnius, Lithuania, and peddles them for 9,000 in Petersburg). On the first day Darina sold four jackets by simply standing on the street with them across her arm, earned 2,000 rubles, and never returned to her teaching job. She graduated from "Gaidar 101" very quickly.

Many women in desperate financial need have turned to prostitution. Newspapers in Petersburg are filled with ads offering their services. The shortage of living space has forced this industry to be on a home-delivery basis, but this has its advantages: for an additional 270 rubles, the "geisha" will wash her client's socks (the same rate goes for sadomasochism); for a few hundred more she will also tidy the apartment. Upon request, she gives the client the bill, which says enigmatically, "communal services."

The free market introduced other idiosyncrasies into Russian sexual life. At the "Intim" shop on Insurrection Street in Petersburg, brides and grooms can buy or rent tuxedos, wedding gowns, and veils in the front and then proceed to the back to purchase honeymoon paraphernalia: an artificial phallus (15,000 rubles), fancy garter belts, and creams. If you just want to look at the merchandise, the charge is a mere 50 rubles. If only Russians could satisfy their hunger by simply looking at cottage cheese, fruit, and tea. Then Rosa could make ends meet with her 2,142 rubles a month.

ANNA HUSARSKA

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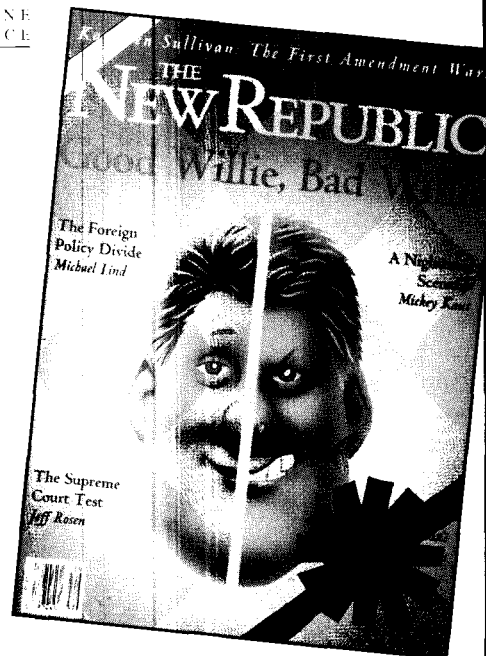
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colleagues, who may or may not be privy to his thoughts, may or may not be about to be sacked, and may or may not be telling the truth about the state of the Yeltsin camp but disperse their prolix theories anyway.

Much better to watch the president's expressions. He is a man unable to hide his emotions or stifle his responses. That same spontaneity that made him stand on a tank outside the White House and damn the coup plotters to hell is a liability in fraught political settings like the Congress. I watched him bang his fist in frustration as the chairman manipulated a procedural vote with the ease of a Svengali. I saw his vast bulk slump in his seat when the electronic scoreboard that reduces decisions of state to a parody of an ice-skating competition flashed up low numbers for the government. And when Yegor Gaidar, his choice for the premiership, failed to be endorsed, I saw a gesture I remembered from film footage of his battles with the Communist Party in the late '80s—a terrifying snarl that is almost always followed by a bite.

The bite came the next day. It was pure Yeltsin, a rash and dramatic appeal to the nation to choose the Congress or him. It was also the finest chunk of invective I have heard in a long time, pent up through months of suffering hindrance from the conservatives who act like a heavy blanket thrown on the flickering flame of reform. In a thundering bass that rendered the microphone superfluous, he denounced the Congress, saying that its "vulgarity and aggression" had "made the walls of this hall blush with shame from endless insults and foul language, from hatred and rudeness, from the filth that fills Congress due to the morbid ambitions of bankrupt politicians."

He reminded me of Shakespeare's Coriolanus, the proud, ill-tempered patrician who, unable to stoop to compromise, took on the mean tribunes and the mob. But Yeltsin is a valiant fighter and, unlike Coriolanus,

an instinctual populist. No sooner had he left the chamber in disgust than he sped to Moscow's biggest car factory. The afternoon shift who gathered with that peculiarly Russian half-interest in matters of state to inquire why the president had decided to pay them an unscheduled visit. The reception was polite but not rapturous. Mostly speakers from the factory floor regaled him with accounts of falling living standards and the rise of mafia-organized sharks profiting from liberalization at the expense of the people. But there was still a hint of the old, passionate support for the man who

broke the Soviet mold: even those who complained about the effects of his reforms joined in the chorus of "Good luck, Boris Nikolayevich" as his stretch Zil sped out of the factory gates.

Yeltsin is a fascinating man—especially in defeat. Before I came to Russia, my liberal hackles rose at his bossiness and scorn, his high-handedness with aides, his habit of issuing decrees to force his will in Parliament. He is a natural authoritarian—he once quelled an interjection from the parliamentary floor with, "Shut up. It is not polite to interrupt the president"—a democrat who threatens his challengers with invoking direct Kremlin rule if they continue to brook his will.

Then I got to Moscow and repented. Political civilization is a long way off here. The Congress and the standing Parliament drawn from it are not in any sense democratic assemblies, but vestiges of the Communist system whence they sprang. Despite the trappings of democracy, Russia is still wedged in the structures of communism, and these cannot be dismantled by polite requests. They need a bulldozer to demolish them, and Yeltsin is such a machine. His wife, Naina, has the tentative look of a spouse who wonders when the next outburst is due.

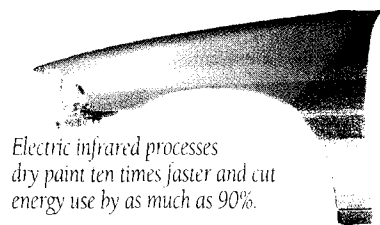
But these last few weeks have shown the limits of even this forceful personality. His program has been hobbled—probably for good—and his prestige among



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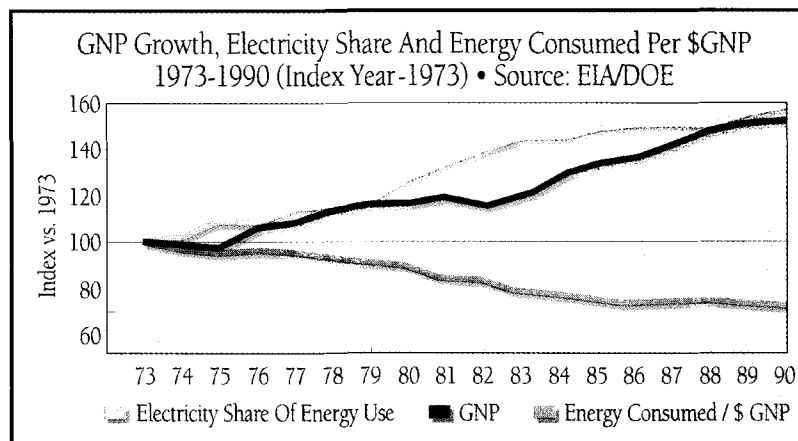
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Russians may soon decline to that among prissy Westerners. His forced dismissal of Gaidar was a stunning humiliation. Yeltsin's misfortune is that he is presiding over three transitions at once: from communism to capitalism, from a regime to a democracy, and from a heterogeneous superpower to a potentially fissiparous nation-state. The troika of tasks may well be too much for one man. As one European diplomat put it as he watched Yeltsin's vast back retreating down a

Kremlin corridor, shoulders hunched and his usual purposeful stride reduced to a lumber, "We never entertained the possibility that reforms might fail. Now we finally have to face up to the fact that their end might be in sight."

ANNE McELVOY, Moscow bureau chief of the *London Times*, is the author of *The Saddled Cow: East Germany's Life and Legacy* (Faber and Faber).

A defense of the younger generation.

THE TWENTYSOMETHING MYTH

By Alexander Star

It used to be that those of us who grew up in the '80s belonged to a generation without a name or even a press agent. But no longer. Ever since *Time* discovered the "twentysomething generation" in the summer of 1990, almost every major cultural institution—from Taco Bell to the Clinton campaign—has tried to devise a twentysomething contraption of its own. Two years ago Bret Easton Ellis could complain that television had "virtually ignored" his generation. This fall the networks stocked twenty-three of thirty-two new shows with dimly sincere major characters in their teens and 20s. Lollapalooza, a traveling festival of alternative rock, masqueraded as a second Woodstock over the summer, drawing large crowds that better-known artists could not. And the Democratic Party, hungry to recapture the youth vote it lost to Reagan and Bush, aimed a thirty-second spot at bike messengers and their friends in the final days before the election. More recently, *The Atlantic* predicted in a sixteen-page piece that a new generation gap would open as earnest baby boomers confront a youthful "carnival culture" devoted to "physical frenzy and spiritual numbness." (The article was more likely to induce the latter than the former.) Even the proper name of this newly ascendant group is commonly debated. MTV suggested, of course, "The MTV Generation," and Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X* and Richard Linklater's film *Slacker* each proposed different generational sobriquets. Behind these efforts at labeling there lurks the increasingly received—and inherently dubious—idea that the generation that came of age in the age of Reagan has finally crafted a distinct identity of its own.

Since its publication in 1991, *Generation X* has become primary source material for the new theorists of youth culture. In Coupland's overlit world of low-end

"McJobs" and high-end stereotypes, the reiteration of ironic gestures becomes the only way to ward off consumer fatigue and intellectual paralysis. Survivors of Wite-Out overdoses and broken Xerox machines, Coupland's characters suffer from "sick building syndrome" and liken their partitioned office cubicles to "veal-fattening pens." Bereft of primary experience, few of their defining events have occurred off-screen. And so cultural icons loom all the larger. Trying to blend into the landscape of television, they identify with the tawdrily famous, enacting the signature tics of sitcom stars with eerie enthusiasm and chatting in "Telethon-ese." They insulate themselves from a frigid regime of futuristic work stations and recycled television shows with hyperbole, self-deprecation, the magnification of the trivial, and the deflation of the sublime. Such habits do not encourage community. Irony may be a universal device, but it is also a divisive and unstable one; only a small group can be in on a particular joke at a particular time. Pinning private meanings onto public faces, Coupland's people cannot understand each other unless they are the best of friends. With the multiplication of irony, suspicion and misunderstanding protrude not only between generations but also within them.

Although Coupland satirizes the impulse, many readers have scanned his work, somewhat desperately, for instant summaries of the new generation. And assertions of group identity are usually followed by assertions of group strength. During the presidential campaign, proclamations of youth power were heard often, even driving a reluctant George Bush onto MTV (where he lectured his 24-year-old interviewer on conversational etiquette). But though first-time voters did play an important role in Clinton's victory, their turnout did not match expectations, and Clinton's slice of the 18- to

29-year-old vote was no larger than his share of the total popular vote. It seems that the '60s fantasy of youth cohesion and control has returned less because young people believe in it themselves than because their elders believe that they should.

The current middle-aged retailing of youth empowerment is perhaps best illustrated by Rock the Vote, a record company-sponsored organization with a nonpartisan mandate to "make voting hip." MTV has given the group millions of dollars in free air time, and Fox aired its T.V. special in the fall, an hour-long collage of skits and videos in which the American political system received an unprecedented number of celebrity endorsements. Rock the Vote's message is that, contrary to appearances, young people do care about their world and are eager to vote (as long as it's easy). But articulating the new idealism can be hard work. Attempting to highlight their generation's accomplishments on the Fox special, Jason Priestley and Lisa Bonet ask, "Who made styro-foam uncool? ... Who inspired a fourth T.V. network?"

Jeff Ayeroff, a co-managing director of Virgin Records, assembled Rock the Vote in 1990, when mandatory record-labeling bills were pending before twenty state legislatures. "I was just sick of the record industry being the scapegoat for organizations like [Tipper Gore's] PMRC," he said then. Working to organize resistance to the labeling laws, Ayeroff noted to his colleagues that the Recording Industry Association of America "didn't have a grass-roots organization" operating on its behalf. (Given the RIAA's anti-consumer efforts to impose a tax on home taping, this should not have been a surprise.) He first assumed that Rock the Vote could mobilize young voters to defeat record-labeling efforts. During the election campaign his organization cleverly reversed the premise—"once young people are aware of what censorship means," the president of Geffen Records explained, "we believe that voter apathy will cease." Despite its professions of altruism, Rock the Vote's approach to youth politics is not exactly disinterested.

To its credit, Rock the Vote has mobilized support for the motor voter bill and registered young voters in several states. It also challenged election laws in court, establishing in one New Hampshire county that prospective voters cannot be required to produce a birth certificate or passport in order to register. Rock the Vote is best known, however, for its irreverent celebrity promos aired on MTV urging young people to cast ballots (Madonna wrapped in an American flag threatening a "spankie"; Ice-T warning of a "hostile takeover"). Indeed, this fall it became hard for television viewers to avoid lyrics like: "Vote baby vote / Vote baby vote / Are you registered baby?"

Unfortunately, for the most part these calls to generational responsibility are either hypocritical or defensive. Many of the stars—from Madonna to Iggy Pop—who appeared in the first round of Rock the Vote promos had never voted themselves, as *Rolling Stone* reported. Responding to dismal rates of youth voting,

Rock the Vote printed a coupon on compact disc boxes to support the motor voter bill. It read: "We aren't as apathetic as people think. It's just that the laws make it hard for many of us to register." But it's not that hard. And though more than 50 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were unregistered, it was the turnout of *registered* young voters that dropped fastest in the '80s.

Rock the Vote facilely combines libertarian politics with corporate-sponsored paternalism, spreading an absolutist position on free speech while its record company sponsors quietly knuckle under to pressure groups. (In fact, the most effective censor in the music business is MTV, which consolidates its power by strictly regulating which bands qualify for its "new music" formats.) As traditional ideologies fracture into the micropolitics of identity and the nonpolitics of celebrities, Rock the Vote tries in vain to conjure a coalition. Proudly claiming the mantle of political crusades of the past, it mobilizes young people to fight for a right that already exists and that no one is threatening to revoke. Behind its public service front, Rock the Vote is a simulation of public sentiment, another exercise in the ersatz populism of the business elite. At a time when it's increasingly hard to distinguish the artificial turf from the grass roots, Rock the Vote organizes young people to support Time Warner's right to speak, not their own.

Just as Rock the Vote lacks the authenticity of a real political movement, so the latest twentysomething T.V. shows conspicuously lack the subversive glee that "The Simpsons" and "Wayne's World" brought to television a few years ago. Instead, they betray the haste of story editors cobbling old formulas to new target audiences. These programs range from Fox's "The Heights," in which an improbably large rock band works successfully to get its theme song played on MTV, to NBC's "The Round Table," which tries to coax entertainment out of what is possibly the duller of all subjects—the lives of young people in Washington, D.C. The most conspicuous example is Fox's "Melrose Place," a "Beverly Hills 90210" spin-off for high school graduates that aspires to the emblematic status of "thirtysomething." The ensemble of would-be actresses, writers, and marketers inhabits an apartment complex of its own (generational solidarity is enforced by zoning). Alison, a receptionist in an ad agency, strives to convince the company to take her offbeat proposals more seriously. Billy roams the streets in a cab, struggling with the realization that he is a mediocre scriptwriter. The show, which is itself littered with limp screenplays, is framed by off-beat ads.

"Melrose Place" is best when it turns its own "entertainment values" against themselves, suggestively equating the impulses to merchandise, fictionalize, and falsify. In one early episode, a drug-addicted art consultant sells a phony painting to the lead singer of the band L.A. Guns, who is playing himself. But most of the story lines are standard problem-of-the-week fare, sacrificing the gradual establishment of personality to the rapid sampling of topical issues such as co-dependency and car-

diofunk. And the quest for generational credibility is often strained. When Billy explains that he can't pay back his student loans because of the recession, the woman at the collection agency replies, "Do you think this McJob is my Nirvana?" Earnestly gluing the buzz words together, the script assembles its twentysomethingspeak out of hype, without even the redeeming gloss of irony.

Unlike commercial television, which remains well-groomed and timid even when it tries to experiment, popular music often communicates confusion and rage. The Lollapalooza festival, which toured the country each of the past two summers, aims to be a traveling road show of generational defiance, complete with nipple-piercing exhibits, samples of virtual reality, and the adventurous music of bands like the Butthole Surfers and Jesus & Mary Chain. Lollapalooza is primarily the invention of Perry Farrell, lead singer for the since-expired group Jane's Addiction. Farrell's goal was to restore an aura of danger and dissent to popular music.

But for all its anarchic bravado, Lollapalooza is an uncomfortable mix of sub-cultural pride and multimedia chaos. Although it gathers diverse "scenes" into what Farrell hopes will be a recombined counterculture, the result is hardly a new synthesis. Devotees of metal and hip-hop and punk pride themselves on their abrasiveness; they don't blend in the wash. And the festival's attitude toward the media is decidedly mixed. Farrell, who exhibited smashed television sets in cages on the tour, disdains mass entertainment. In his theology, largely derived from Jim Morrison, sin equals self-denial, and self-denial equals watching T.V. But Lollapalooza's success is inconceivable without the promotional activities of MTV, which, according to one executive, wishes to transform itself from a "rock and roll network" into a "generational network." Genre-crossing bands like Jane's Addiction and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, which incorporate fragments of funk, rap, punk, and metal into their acts, are the perfect vehicles for such an aspiration.

Lollapalooza's political ambitions are similarly incon-

sistent. Farrell wants to start some kind of post-Reagan insurrection by promoting "confrontation," excess, and austerity. "Both decadence and the back-to-nature impulse are about freedom," he explains. "You feel free when you hit the great outdoors and you feel free when you get intoxicated." But he also invited the NRA and Army recruiters to join his youth circus. (The NRA later took out newspaper ads to denounce Lollapalooza artist Ice-T and his song "Cop Killer.")

Lollapalooza's popularity underscores one genuinely important feature of today's youth culture—the breakdown of the boundary between "mainstream" and "alternative" entertainment. On the one hand, the former

dominant mass audience that Johnny Carson addressed has apparently fallen into a welter of competing subcultures. On the other hand, those very subcultures have seen their attitudes and fashions gathered into the mainstream. As alternative cultural phenomena like grunge rock (the latest marriage of hard rock and punk) become more popular, the manufacturers of taste respond by buying them up, bonding them, and bowdlerizing them.

One of the few enterprises to survive such cultural implosion intact is *Sassy* magazine, which manages to be a teenage girls' magazine and a satire of a teenage girls' magazine at the

same time. *Sassy* assumes that its readers are immersed in teen culture's icons and artifacts but regard them with skepticism and humor, and are eager for new sources of information and entertainment. Little-known bands and homemade magazines are introduced in each issue. Teen idols like Johnny Depp (the actor) and Keanu Reeves (who would very much like to be an actor) appear regularly, but are also held up to intelligent scrutiny and mockery. ("The traditional definition of a hero is someone who sacrifices him or herself for a higher purpose.... They are usually the founder of a new religion, nation, or way of life.... Now, what has Luke Perry done to redeem humanity? At press time, nothing. Still, he is widely adored.") *Sassy's* political slant is unabashedly p.c. ("What the Heck Are We Doing in the Persian Gulf?" thanked

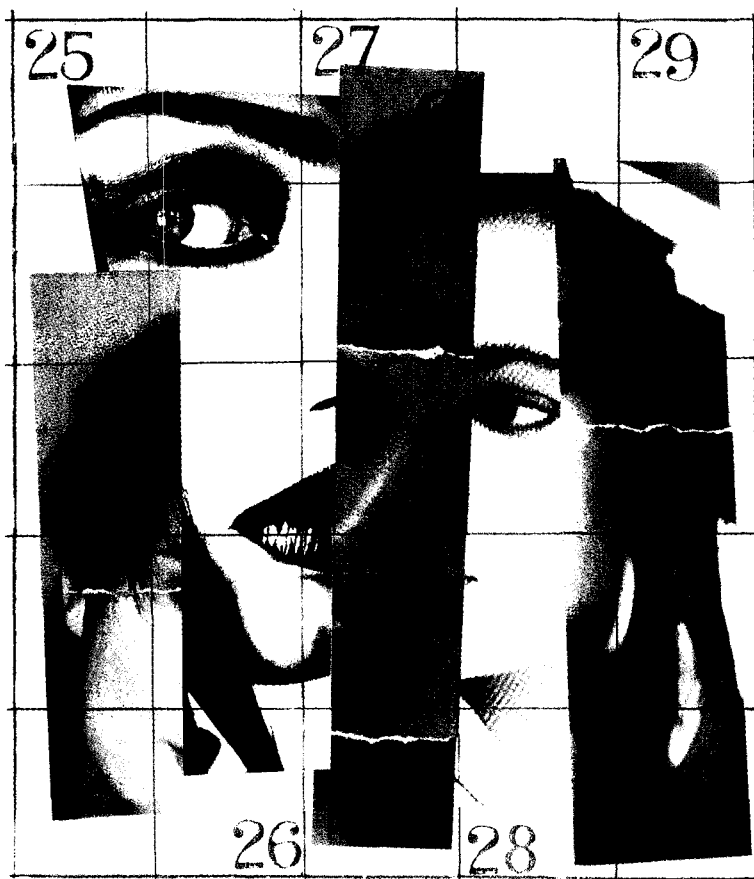


ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Ramsey Clark for his work as a fact checker), but the magazine has cast a cool eye on the excesses of animal rights activists and anti-censorship zealots, and it has published frank discussions with pro-life teens. Attuned to the incoherencies of its audience, *Sassy* sits at the cusp of mainstream and alternative tastes, poking fun at the former and publicizing the latter to its more than 750,000 readers.

Sassy will survive, but most of its older twentysomething cousins probably will not. Already many of the new T.V. series have been canceled. Fox's Rock the Vote special finished 96th in the week's ratings, despite the presence of Priestley and Bonet. Of course, such rapid turnover is virtually a tradition. Since World War II, advertisers have constructed and catered to a succession of youth markets. (In 1968 Columbia Records advertised itself with the slogan, "The Man Can't Bust Our Music.") There's nothing new in Fox's assumption that it can make a profit without a single viewer over 50; record companies and movie studios have operated on similar premises for years. Fox's sponsors know that though young people have less money to spend, they are more likely to try new products, to experiment with identities and commodities, to respond to the easily

manipulated dictates of style. These sponsors also know that, even as the disposable income of young people declines, they can use the allure of youth to reach an older and more prosperous clientele. The Gap has built a clothing empire by securing a teenage base and then launching a retail assault on babies and the middle-aged; its latest ad campaign puns that "For Every Generation There's A Gap."

This kind of generational packaging continues even as the actual bases of generational cohesion erode. Changing family roles and occupational hierarchies, the universal accessibility of the mass media to all age groups, early exposure to work and sex, gadgets and crime, have made age a less, not more, reliable indica-

tor of taste, values, and behavior. The idea of generational culture is itself largely a byproduct of the considerable leisure and prosperity that young people enjoyed in the '50s and '60s, together with the existence of overarching causes like Vietnam. Today, a generic youth culture has been assembled from above precisely because it doesn't exist down below. How can one generalize about a group that is said to be politically disengaged and politically correct, obsessed with surfaces and addicted to irony, scarred by Watergate and Vietnam

and unaware of them, technologically savvy and unconditionally ignorant, busy saving the planet and craving electricity and noise, prematurely careerist and proud to be lazy, unwilling to grow up and too grown up already? As young people acquire adult responsibilities (and adult vices) at an earlier age, their distinctness as a group diminishes. They do not stamp a unique sensibility on society so much as mirror its disarray.

The twentysomething generation is indeed a myth—an imaginary resolution of real contradictions. Many young people do like grunge rock, gourmet coffee, and green politics, at least for the moment. Many do share an ironic immersion in the mass media and an interest in alternatives to it; many are well disposed to political activism, especially if

it is cost-free and corporate-sponsored. But these characteristics don't cohere into a shared identity. Irony, after all, is inimical to solidarity. The shared taste for cultural alternatives similarly tends toward fragmentation, as Lollapalooza demonstrates. Appreciators of world beat and industrial noise don't necessarily have much in common, and one man's subculture is another man's sellout. Today's youth-based political activism also splits people up with its competing concerns. The twentysomething craze, like its components, will probably blow over soon. And when it has, this generation is still unlikely to have found a common voice, for its true cultural legacy is to have been disunited by the very experiences it has had in common. •

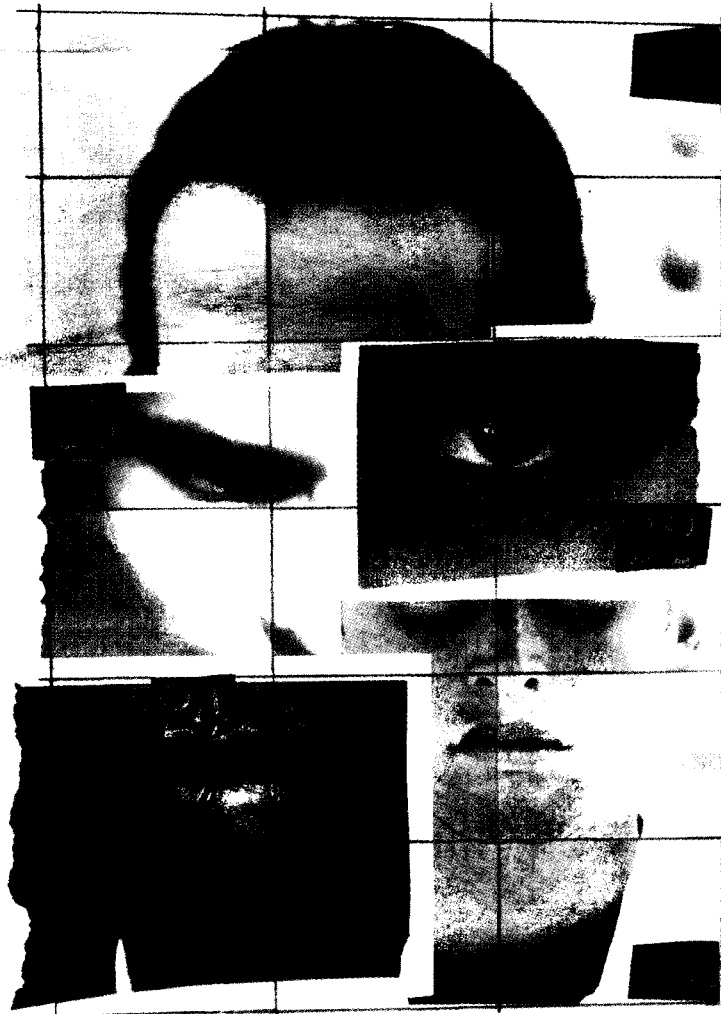


ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Citizen Caine

I liked *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (Walt Disney) before it began. First, the press kit contained a photo of Kermit the Frog as Bob Cratchit and Michael Caine as Scrooge. The caption read: "Academy Award-winning Michael Caine (right) stars as the legendary miser Ebenezer Scrooge." I really relished being told that Caine was the one on the right.

Second, the very idea of the Muppets "acting," playing other persons, was attractive, especially since they were adding their appeal to the risks of the Dickens tale. Foreknowledge of the sentimentalities in *A Christmas Carol* is no safeguard: it always makes me cry. Oscar Wilde, no Dickens enthusiast, said: "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing." Well, one must have an even stonier heart to read of the melting of Scrooge without melting a little. The Muppets would turn up the lachrymose heat.

The picture itself added reasons. The Muppets proved again that they have double power: with children (as I heard all around me in the theater) and with those who escort them. One of the double whammies: near the start, Scrooge orders his bookkeepers to send out eviction notices, and Bob Cratchit reminds him that tomorrow is Christmas. Says Scrooge: "Have them gift-wrapped." Impure Dickens, of course, but pure Muppet—as are many more throwaway lines, gestures, clearings of the throat.

Still another reason: the picture relieved me of some guilt. Lately I've been feeling like a social outcast in respect to children's pictures, notably *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*,

and *Aladdin*, all three of which excruciated me. All of them seemed mobile versions of Hallmark Cards, When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best. In *Aladdin*, for instance, the only interesting point for me was that the heroine, an Arab princess, had brown skin and a Semitic profile. Well, basking in the Muppet glow, I felt licensed to go on disliking those Disney bonbons.

This film's chief success is in blending the Muppets with (a relatively few) human actors. No one in the picture, Muppet or mortal, ever notes the difference, which may be a kind of lesson to us all. The mix of three-dimensional puppets with people seems more of an achievement than mixing cartoon characters with people, as in *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?* Not technically but imaginatively. The Muppets compete more for credibility with humans than do cartoon characters because they are *there*. Lasers and computers aren't involved.

Jerry Juhl's screen version of Dickens

plays pretty fast but not too loose with the original. It could hardly do otherwise with a cast in which Tiny Tim is a froglet and his mother is Miss Piggy. Brian Henson, son of the late loved Jim, directed skillfully. Frank Oz, 29-year Muppet veteran, was the executive producer and also plays Miss Piggy along with several other characters. The Muppet future does not seem at risk.

Caine's Scrooge isn't terribly old—he's brown-haired. In the early section he is much less crusty than Scrooges usually are. (The best, by the way, was the forgotten Sir Seymour Hicks in 1935.) Caine was apparently aiming for reality and succeeded a mite too well; but his moments of remorse are truly moving, and his closing song is a rouser.

One of the shops in the film's London is called Micklewhite's. It's an in-joke: Michael Caine was born Maurice Micklewhite. This, along with much else, is revealed in his autobiography, *What's It All About?* (Turtle Bay, 521 pp., \$24), one of the brighter star autobiographies to come along in many a conceit-clouded moon.

He wrote it himself, he (credibly) claims, and we discover the engaging man behind the engaging performances. But there's more than charm. He was born dirt poor in the East End of London. His father was a fish porter in Billingsgate Market; his mother was the staunch center of the family, which mothers in impoverished families so often are. Through the first half of the book, as Caine tells of his struggle to find out what he was, what he wanted to be, and whether he could get there, a dark strain of bitterness persists, the close-lipped bitterness of someone born on the wrong side of the English class system who had to fight that system and doesn't want to forget it.

Some have asked why he clings to his cockney accent in private life and in those roles where another sort of accent is not required. (He can do others; the first time I saw him, as a cavalry officer in *Zulu*, he had a plummy upper-class

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Glen Gary Glen Ross. *Splendid performances in a good transmutation of an excellent play. David Mamet accomplishes what Arthur Miller and his salesman were groping for. (Reviewed 10/26/92)* **Intervista.** *How to make a scintillating film when you have no film to make. Federico Fellini, conjurer of genius, summons up two hours of bliss in a rhapsody about his profession. (12/7/92)* **Malcolm X.** *Not the best that could have been done with the subject but a generally fiery account of an important life. Spike Lee keeps it all vivid if not first-class, and the same is true of Denzel Washington's performance. (12/21/92)* **Simple Men.** *Hal Hartley's latest confirms that he has unique writing-directing gifts, wry, humorous, quietly disturbing. About two brothers looking for their fugitive radical father. (11/9/92)* —SK

drawl. I thought Caine was a gent.) To have "improved" his own speech would have been, in his view apparently, to betray his origins, to strip himself of his pride that a boy from Camberwell had made his way to the top.

He had the usual basketful of jobs as a youth; he did military service in Korea (loathed the army); he made his way through early acting jobs in provincial theaters where he learned a good deal about his profession. Eventually, after much grind, he broke into films, then attracted attention in *Alfie* (1966) as a cockney Casanova. This really launched him.

The book includes nice chewy bits about his work: how he learned to listen as an actor; how he learned about reacting; why he gave up theater for film. He thinks, rightly or wrongly, that film acting is more subtle. In any case, his videotape, *Acting in Film*, and the published transcript have the best advice on the subject that I know—a diamond-cutter's secrets.

Caine's last chapter is a shocker, a Dickensian twist that happens to be fact. He discovered, relatively recently, that he had a half-brother nine years older, who was kept in an institution because of epilepsy. His mother had visited this son secretly every week, without anyone else in the family knowing about it.

Other secrets, not quite so grave, are recounted about other people. An in-

stance: he once asked Vivien Leigh how she acquired her accent for Scarlett O'Hara. She replied that she had said "four door Ford" all day long for weeks, "except that when she said it, it came out 'foah doah Fohd.'"

The second half of the book seems unwittingly influenced by the first. The cockney boy never quite got over being awestruck by glitter. The name-dropping and restaurant-dropping are incessant. "At our table were Barbra Streisand, Jack Nicholson, and Clint Eastwood, plus Barry Manilow." "I gave a dinner for Princess Michael of Kent at Morton's, a new restaurant and fashionable rendezvous." "We dined by the Thames at The Compleat Angler in Marlow and at The Waterside Inn at Bray." (What journals he must have kept.) The natural result of all this is that he now owns five restaurants.

Still, few readers will not warm to a book whose first line is: "Well—what do you think of it so far?" Or that says:

I have always disliked the kiss-and-tell type of autobiography. Firstly because I have been the victim of several . . . and secondly because if you are a man and the book is by a woman there is invariably an assessment of your sexual prowess. While I am not afraid of this, I have a professional aversion to being reviewed, no matter how favorably, for a performance for which I was not paid. Especially when the critic was in the show. •

point in my career, I need to challenge myself," she decided to do the play anyway and to set it in a room.

The room is her second mistake. *Woyzeck* is, in large part, a rebuke to the expansive idealizing of nature espoused by such Romantics as Goethe and Schiller, but the action is nevertheless fully planted in the exterior world. Images of nature seep like a decomposing leitmotiv throughout the dialogue, and the word "nature" is endlessly repeated. The grandmother compares the moon to a piece of rotten wood, the sun to a dried-up sunflower, the earth to an overturned pot, the stars to wilted flies. Woyzeck, who spends most of the action outdoors, sees fire flashing through the sky, hallucinates about a head rolling through the grass, and, pleading "the call of nature," pisses against a wall like a dog. (Responding to the Captain's moral exhortations, he says, "Us common people, we have no morality, we don't have virtue, we act like nature tells us.")

Büchner's approach to human nature and the natural world is, of course, the very opposite of bucolic. It is gross, fateful, hallucinatory, lethal, deterministic—almost to the point where *Woyzeck* could be called an anti-pastoral. But it is rural meanness and folk cruelty that inform the play, not domestic angst. Except for some irrelevant clips from her *Lenz* film showing Jesse Borrego, who plays Woyzeck, scaling a cliff, Akalaitis's production is stuck in a house, all interior, as if the outside world had ceased to exist.

Part of her plan, I would guess, is to demonstrate how Büchner anticipated Buchenwald, and there is no question that some characters—notably the white-smocked nurses who assemble for medical lectures, the callous Mengele-like Doctor who performs clinical experiments on Woyzeck (he puts him on a diet of peas)—behave like callous proto-Nazis. Marina Draghici's gray, tortured setting—a group of angular alcoves in a constructivist room—certainly evokes, under Mimi Jordan Sherin's harsh fluorescent lighting, the cold gray glow of the concentration camp. The Drum Major who seduces Woyzeck's mistress, Marie, is a blond Aryan beast, and the action frequently stops to accommodate automatons marching in place. As for Borrego's Woyzeck, he is uniformed like a *soldat* out of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, in German army fatigues and puttees, but his emaciated body and shaved head make him seem more like an inmate of Auschwitz. (The barber Woyzeck is compared to a razor—Borrego actually looks like one.)

In her program note, Akalaitis explains that, although she loves the freedom of scenery and wagons, with *Woyzeck*, "I wanted to trap myself in a room." The

Robert Brustein on Theater

Büchner in an Unfurnished Room

Karl Georg Büchner died in 1837 at the age of 23, leaving some letters, a student thesis on the nervous system of fish, a political tract, an unfinished novella (*Lenz*), two completed plays (*Danton's Death* and *Leonce and Lena*), and a series of dramatic fragments called *Woyzeck*. Despite this meager output, however, he has become the most seminal influence on twentieth-century drama, his early death endowing him with an almost legendary reputation. Two years ago, the Hartford Stage Company staged *Woyzeck* in a searing production by Richard Foreman. This season, the Alley Theater mounted Robert Wilson's exquisite interpretation of *Danton's Death*. While still a free-lance director, JoAnne Akalaitis directed *Leonce and Lena* (intercut with a movie based on *Lenz*) at the Guthrie Theater in a Texas

setting. Now, as the new artistic director of Joseph Papp's Public Theater, she has turned her attention to *Woyzeck*.

Her choice is understandable, perhaps predictable. Possibly because it is a tantalizing series of unfinished scenes in uncertain order, *Woyzeck* is a mountain that every auteur director, at some career point or other, feels compelled to climb, whether or not he or she connects with the work. (It is also a deck of cards that each succeeding translator wants to reshuffle, the latest being Henry J. Schmidt.) Akalaitis admits that she doesn't have a philosophical affinity with Büchner's conviction that "it is impossible to be happy in this existence," as she correctly describes it in her published opening remarks to the cast, or that "the world is a machine, and the machine defeats us." But attracted by Büchner's language and because "at this

trouble is that she has also trapped the audience and the play. There's something cramped and constricted about her production, something claustrophobic even by Büchnerian standards. Philip Glass's songs, accompanied by piano runs and violin arpeggios, are limpid and liquid as always, and the chorus engages in some spirited clog dances when it is not moving viscerally in slow motion. But the pace and the acting style induce a mood of monotony that robs the play of terror.

Not altogether of pity, though. The domestic setting reveals something about *Woyzeck* that I hadn't noticed before—its similarities to *Othello*. Büchner's debt to Shakespeare is profound—it permeates *Danton's Death*—but I never realized until Akalaitis's production that *Woyzeck* was conceived as a working-class *Othello*, with Marie functioning as his Desdemona and the Drum Major (who even has a drunk scene) as his rival Cassio. *Othello* smothers the woman he believes to be unfaithful to him, *Woyzeck* uses a crude knife, but both employ images of paleness to describe her lifeless state.

Although both women are killed by men, however, I don't think the Desdemona parallel is close enough to make Marie into another of Akalaitis's victimized feminist heroines. Her murder is now the most extended scene in the play, with *Woyzeck* stalking the poor woman in slow motion, first cutting her hand, then her throat, then stabbing her in various parts of the body. Akalaitis has testified, in another interview, that "Marie is certainly the only sane person in the play. She's trying to revolutionize her life. She's trying to find happiness—some kind of wholesome, physical, erotic well-being. It just doesn't work out because this guy kills her." This suggests the same skewed approach she brought to *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, which became less a tragedy of incestuous passion than a sociological case study about how sexually active women are brutalized by men.

I fear that Akalaitis shares with the more radical ideologues of the feminist movement an almost complete indifference to history, as if all the literature, religion, and science of the past were either sexist conspiracies or precursors of women's studies programs. This tendentiousness has once again led her to misread a play. Büchner's Marie hardly thinks of herself as a liberated woman "trying to revolutionize her life"; she is rather an anguished, guilty creature who feels abandoned by God and identifies with the biblical woman taken in adultery. *Woyzeck* expects to see blisters on her mouth; Marie half expects to see them herself. To make Marie instead of *Woyzeck* the central victim is to rob the play of its existential horror.

Focusing on the male anti-hero, Fore-

man's Hartford production ended with a stunning scene: *Woyzeck* trying to submerge the murder weapon in a number of shallow pools while washing the blood off his hands. Although Akalaitis's more mundane final image is a film shot of clouds crossing the moon, Borrego also gets a chance to wash his blood-stained hands—in an upstage bathroom where, in an earlier scene, we saw naked men showering. Apparently *Woyzeck* manages to sneak in a shower, too, because he soon returns to face us, backlit, in full frontal nudity. I remember that Borrego also emerged buck naked from a bath in her production of *Leonce and Lena*. For Akalaitis the world of Büchner, like the world of Lear, would seem to be populated with poor, bare (and dripping wet) forked animals.

Borrego, improving as a classical actor after stints in the television series *Fame*, does a creditable enough job in the role, but that's a relative judgment. Aside from Zach Grenier as the Captain and Denis O'Hare as the Doctor, most of the performances are flat and uninflected. To be frank, I'm a little puzzled about what inner necessity, other than sympathy for women, motivated the talented Akalaitis to do this play. The production

is tolerable without being urgent, competent without being inspired—a major universe compressed into a tiny space.

And that is generally the way the Public can be described this year with its atmosphere of constriction and retrenchment, reductions and cutbacks. Although Joe Papp's energies were only at full burst in the spring, he usually had a dozen projects going at this time, either on the performance stage or in the planning stage. Akalaitis has thus far only originated *Woyzeck*, filling in gaps with a handful of imported one-person shows. Her announced 1992-93 centerpiece, the two parts of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, though also imported (from the Mark Taper Theater in Los Angeles), is now destined to go straight to Broadway, leaving the Public with a gaping hole in its season. Public Theater subscribers will presumably be permitted to see the commercial run at subscription prices, but they have a right to know how the various spaces on Lafayette Street will be filled in coming months. The problem is not hers alone: JoAnne Akalaitis needs to become as imaginative with her programming as she is with her staging if the Public is going to maintain any leadership in the New York theater world. •

Did women create the welfare state?

The Mothers of Invention

BY ALAN WOLFE

I.

Now that communism is dead and social democracy is in remission, perhaps the old debate about "American exceptionalism" will expire, too. Since the beginning of this century, socialists and sociologists have asked the question of why Americans seemed to be so far behind Europe in using government to promote greater equality; but to the degree that events in the real world since 1989 have anything to do with the academy and its theories, it is no longer possible to say what "behind" and "ahead" mean. The 1990s are a particularly inauspicious time to revive the old interest in American exceptionalism, yet

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that is precisely what Theda Skocpol attempts in her new book.

But with a twist. Americans are exceptional, Skocpol argues, but not because they were behind the Europeans. In important ways, she believes, Americans were actually ahead of the rest of the

*Protecting Soldiers and Mothers:
The Political Origins of Social Policy
in the United States*

by Theda Skocpol
(Harvard University Press, 714 pp., \$34.95)

world in providing non-stigmatizing governmental benefits to needy people, and in amounts generous enough to make positive changes in the conditions of their lives. We did not have the last welfare state, we had the first. And we have not fully recognized our accomplishment, Skocpol continues, because our welfare state was created by, and worked

to the benefit of, women.

We are mistaken, says Skocpol, to identify progress solely with the fortunes of the working class. To be sure, American workers have not fared well by the standards of Europe. Our labor unions actually opposed legislation to regulate hours and wages. The courts in the United States went out of their way, until 1937, to strike down laws that give workers a leg to stand on in their struggles with capitalists. Consequently the American working class was unable to lead the battle for benefits that would redound to the universal advantage of all, such as old age pensions, social insurance, and government-financed health care. But the inability of workers to grasp hold of government and to use it to their advantage did not mean that government was inactive. Soldiers and mothers used government well, and presciently. They demonstrated what a well-organized political campaign and administrative leadership could accomplish. And so they were able to bring about significant changes in the relationship between government and citizen, changes that still reverberate.

Skocpol's story starts with soldiers. At least since the early nineteenth century, governments have not asked young men to risk their lives without promising them, implicitly or explicitly, that their needs, or those of their widows, will be met. Pensions were granted to all American war veterans in 1832, and four years later at least some widows started receiving them, too. But it was the Civil War that transformed soldiers' pensions and widows' pensions into "a kind of precocious social security system for those U.S. citizens of a certain generation and region who were deemed morally worthy of enjoying generous and honorable public aid."

The amount of federal dollars spent on Civil War pensions increased dramatically between 1870 and 1910, as the veterans aged. The statistics culled by Skocpol are impressive. By 1893, 41.5 percent of the federal government's income was being spent on Civil War pensions. Approximately 28.5 percent of all elderly men, and 8 percent of all elderly women, were receiving such benefits in 1910. Ninety-three percent of all veterans were enrolled in the system by 1915. Some number of Americans, by all accounts not an insignificant number, enjoyed the government's largess even at the height of the American worship of laissez-faire.

Ultimately it proved impossible, despite the best efforts of farsighted reformers, to transform the Civil War pensions into a system of old age insurance or workingman's insurance. The

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system died when the veterans did. Still, argues Skocpol, it did not have to be so. Elite organizations such as the American Association for Labor Legislation pushed for social insurance, but a variety of factors—the reluctance of labor, fears of corruption, the AALL's rigid structure, a conservative political environment—proved fatal. Had such groups been able to build on the model of the war pensions, America would have had the same kind of paternalistic welfare state as England or Germany.

The defeat of this system did have one potentially positive consequence. A maternalist welfare state succeeded when the paternalistic welfare state failed. What men could not accomplish, women achieved. Progressive social reform took place in America due to "the heights of social organization, ideological self-consciousness, and political mobilization achieved by American middle-class women around the turn of the twentieth century." These women took the rhetoric of the household and extended it to the polity as a whole. If women were understood to have the special moral responsibility of caring for others, and if others were taken to mean not just the immediate family but also the larger community, the language for justifying an activist state had been found. Skocpol is fond of quoting Rheta Childe Door's book of 1910, *What Eight Million Women Want*: "Woman's place is in the home. This is a platitude which no woman will ever dissent from.... But Home is not contained within the four walls of an individual home. Home is the community. The city full of people is the Family. The public school is the real Nursery. And so badly do the Home and the Family and the Nursery need their mother."

Skocpol means three things by a maternalist welfare state. The first is protective legislation for women workers. Between 1900 and World War I, thirty-nine states passed or improved laws regulating the maximum hours that women could work. The Supreme Court ruled that maximum hours were unconstitutional in *Lochner v. New York* (1905), after *Dred Scott*, the most infamous case in its history. But three years later, in *Muller v. Oregon*, the Court indicated its willingness to uphold a law that regulated hours for women. The Court was to some degree moved by Louis Brandeis's historic brief, which focused on the real conditions faced by women in the work force, though it also opined that the physical differences between the sexes required different levels of constitutional scrutiny. Skocpol interprets the successful campaigns for hours regula-

tion as a victory for progress led by women. It is a debatable point, to which I shall return.

The second element of Skocpol's maternalist welfare state was mothers' pensions. Before 1920, forty American states passed laws enabling local governments to give poor mothers cash help in raising their children. Upper-class women reformers took the lead in agitating in support of the needy. They waged an effective public relations campaign, utilizing women's magazines and enlisting the help of prominent men. The result was a victory for women's activism over the opposition of charitable organizations (which did not want their monopoly broken) and labor reformers.

The third and most important feature of the maternalist welfare state was what Skocpol calls "statebuilding for mothers and babies." The Children's Bureau, created in 1912, stands for Skocpol as a model of how political activists can carve out a niche in public consciousness and then organize around the state to keep attention focused on a social problem. The story of the Children's Bureau is quite remarkable. Before women won the right to vote, Julia Lathrop, soon to be head of the Children's Bureau, became an effective practitioner of lobbying at one end and using government at the other. Lathrop carefully studied the Department of Agriculture as a model for the politics of constituency building, organizing public interest in the health of children as a way of putting pressure on the government to respond to the needs of children. Her crowning success was the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Bill in 1921, which provided federal funding for maternal and infant health programs. For Skocpol, activities such as these constituted an early lesson in "state building," in the art and the science of using government to make the world a little better. So it was that American women understood the potentialities inherent in government long before the New Deal even came into being.

The maternalist welfare state, however, was not a long-term success. None of the three innovations discussed by Skocpol survived the 1930s. Widows' and mothers' pensions were funded inadequately and became little more than "poor relief," offered only to the worst off after demeaning entitlement tests were put in place. Maximum hours laws were upheld by the Supreme Court, but minimum wage laws for women were not. Sheppard-Towner was killed by Congress in 1929. And even the Children's Bureau, the greatest success in this story, was superseded by the Social Security

Act of 1935. Still, Skocpol wishes to avoid a "downbeat" conclusion, because contemporary feminists and welfare state advocates can learn much from the story. It should teach them to respect the ability of women to create "encompassing and geographically far-flung women's organizations." True, "the United States is never going to have a European-style welfare state.... But the possibility remains that America might develop strong, universal social programs designed to help working single-parent and two-parent families live well and raise their children."

II.

If Skocpol's analysis is correct, historians and social theorists have misunderstood nothing less than the course of the modern state. If she is right, we will have to rethink the problem of which social groups are the "carriers" of progress, and substitute women for workers. We will have to conclude that protective legislation for women is not paternalism, but progress. We will have to give a new date to the birth of an active state, at least a half a century earlier, and discover its origins not in Progressivism, but in the system of Civil War pensions. We will have to reject the notion that political rights, especially the right to vote, are the basis of political progress. And we will have to keep alive the notion that America is exceptional compared with other Western societies. The failure of the American working class to create a socialist political tradition need not lead to despair, for the activism of American women offers an alternative tradition that provides a basis for hope.

All this, again, if Skocpol is right. But is she right? We might begin to answer the question by contrasting her interpretation of the events described in her book with the way they have been treated by others. For what is really at issue here is not the discovery of a welfare state that nobody noticed, but the interpretation of events that have long been part of America's historical consciousness.

There is no single traditional interpretation that stands in contrast to Skocpol's, but something like one can be assembled from a wide variety of accounts. Civil War pensions, for example, may have been little more than a quasi-legal kind of corruption. They were anything but universal (as Skocpol acknowledges). Those who lived in the states of the former Confederacy were denied them. Blacks experienced the usual discrimination in these matters, particularly veterans of the Union Army who had been former slaves. Of course, immigrants who came after 1865 need not

have applied, which excluded a vast portion of the fin de siècle working class. And despite widows' pensions, men benefited far more than women.

To the degree that they constituted a claim on the public purse, Civil War pensions were the result of effective lobbying by the Grand Army of the Republic and other interest groups, often with close ties to the Republican Party. The Pension Bureau frequently acted as little more than the grease in the Republican machine that dominated American politics in the last half of the nineteenth century. If, in sum, our objective is to discover precursors of universalistic, non-stigmatizing public policies, then Civil War pensions would hardly seem to fit the bill. Indeed, it was precisely the widespread perception of Civil War pensions as virtual graft that stood in the way of a system of social insurance in turn-of-the-century America, as Skocpol also acknowledges. Far from being a shadow version of the welfare state, Civil War pensions were a major obstacle. Opponents of social insurance and workingman's insurance could point to the Civil War system as proof that government benefits fuel only public corruption, not public virtue.

The traditional interpretation of the creation of a maternalist welfare state is the most widely known. Protective legislation for women is viewed by many contemporary feminists as a step backward, not forward. One of feminism's most determined attacks on a received historical concept was launched against the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres, which held that women belonged in the home, while men properly inhabited the larger public world of politics and economics. From such a perspective, to extend the separate sphere of the home to the community as a whole is still to accept a separate sphere. If the goal of the women's movement is equality between the sexes, then protective legislation, and any other policy premised on the notion that women belong in one place and men in another, can only reinforce differences that many feminists consider invidious.

Only the ease with which men could accept the idea of women as different and needful of protection explains why protective legislation was widely passed to regulate hours but only fifteen states passed laws regulating wages. That women would work fewer hours would not only keep them at home more, it would also take them out of competition for jobs held by men. Skocpol writes that "given the obstacles, it is testimony to the efficacy of women's politics that

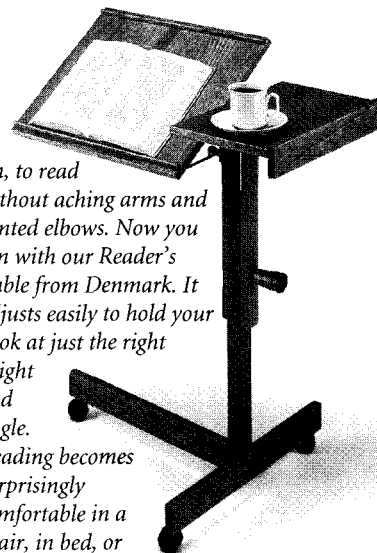
minimum wage laws made as much headway as they did." But in fact there is economic evidence that the passage of minimum wage laws acts as a bias against new entrants into the work force; such laws may have led employers to hire men rather than women. Thus it would be more precise to say that their passage was testimony to the extremely unprogressive ideology of separate spheres.

The traditional reading of these early programs also offers a different account of mothers' pensions. Like other legislation passed under the sign of separate spheres, these pensions were based on the idea that certain classes of women, unable to protect themselves, needed the protection of others. Some people, of course, do need the help of others. But the upper-class women who agitated for mothers' pensions could not sustain the campaign in such a way that the pensions were adequately funded. Underprovisioned and moralistic, mothers' pensions became a foreshadowing not of the welfare state, but of welfare: a demeaning system that singled people out for disgrace instead of bringing them up to the level of others. Such a system made a clear distinction between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Skocpol tends to absolve women reformers of advocating such a distinction, but the ideology of separate spheres led naturally to the idea of welfare as charity rather than welfare as right.

If our goal is the creation of a universalistic, non-stigmatizing welfare state, in other words, then the maternalistic welfare state lauded by Skocpol needed to be destroyed before a modern welfare state could come into being. I do not mean to suggest that Skocpol ignores what I have called the traditional interpretation, or even that she argues against it. She is often her own best critic. At many points in her narrative, she acknowledges the importance of arguments against her general conclusions, and it is her own enormous amount of information that enables the reader to challenge these conclusions. But then she offers them anyway.

Thus the reader comes away frustrated by arguments that appear to be on all sides of the issue. It cannot be true that Civil War pensions were "not really a 'welfare state' in any objective or subjective sense" and that they were "a precedent for relatively universalistic, democratic social provision." Nor can we conclude that maternalism involved "the working out of unfortunate intended consequences," but also "would have done much more than earlier or later

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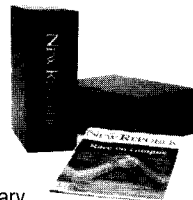
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U.S. systems of social provision ... to buffer families from the full impact of participation in capitalist labor markets." There is nothing necessarily wrong in taking positions on both sides of an issue: historical realities are complicated, and often there are truths on both sides. The problems with Skocpol's contradictory analysis lie not at the level of historical narrative, but at the level of social theory.

For if there is truth in the conventional accounts of Civil War pensions and protective legislation, then there was no early welfare state that would make America exceptional. If we are to believe, on the other hand, that Skocpol has put together an old story in a new way, a story that forces us to revise our understanding of a particular path to modernity, then we need a more convincing case as to why the traditional accounts are wrong. Skocpol never provides such a case. She resorts instead to assertions that do not have sufficient proof to challenge long-standing interpretations of these events.

III.

Although it places so much emphasis on the role played by women in the nineteenth century, Skocpol's book will not please many feminists. From Skocpol's perspective, the world would be a better place if we thought less about glass ceilings in the executive suite and more about mothers who cannot afford to raise their children. One can easily imagine Skocpol cringing at a feminist movement that puts the celebration of lesbian lifestyles or ecofeminist consciousness ahead of bread and butter issues. Her somewhat elliptical criticism of the women's movement for making abortion its major issue is courageous. The large majority of American women want to be able to contribute to the support of their families; Skocpol thinks public policy should help them, and she is right.

It is her treatment of the notion of separate spheres that will be most controversial among feminists. Although there is a good deal of emphasis these days on women's difference from men, very few feminist historians have tried as explicitly as Skocpol does to find value in nineteenth-century versions of women's difference. This is probably the most interesting aspect of her book. For, when the battle for separate spheres was lost, we lost a political discourse that emphasized care and responsibility for others. Indeed, the notion of separate spheres represented the last major challenge to the liberal ideology of atomistic individualism in America. Precisely for this rea-

son, however, a defense of nineteenth-century separate spheres requires an extended theoretical discussion of what paths the welfare state might have taken had it not incorporated the universalistic, individualistic, legalist, and egalitarian assumptions of contemporary liberalism.

Skocpol is not averse to such counterfactual speculation; her entire book, indeed, is premised upon it. Of course, we cannot know with any certainty what might have happened, but one thing seems clear: had the twentieth-century welfare state been based on the notion of separate spheres, it could have evolved in a number of ways vaguely compatible with what today is called communitarianism, but the one thing it could *never* have become is a universalistic, non-moralistic, and generous social democratic welfare state. There is simply too great a tension between the notion that women and men act properly in different spheres of life and the notion that public policies can be designed in a universal and egalitarian fashion. If we want the latter, we must reject the former. Skocpol wants both. It is the most serious theoretical flaw in her book.

It is important to observe that neither soldiers nor mothers are in themselves synonymous with citizens, in the liberal understanding of that term. Soldiers have far fewer rights than ordinary citizens, and they have far greater benefits. They live in an ideal socialist society, trained, fed, and clothed by government while on active duty, and given aid by government for the rest of their lives in the form of college tuition, mortgages, and burial space. In return, they give up many of their rights. They sacrifice the status of liberal citizen, and sometimes suffer a curtailment of their rights, because they have a special duty to the nation, and their service is considered so valuable that extra benefits are justified.

And mothers are, in interesting ways, similar to soldiers. They do not—or did not—fight in wars, but they, too, have a special duty to society, without which society cannot survive. Because they are the agents of its reproduction, society has a particularly keen interest in mothers, one that, on occasion, may conflict with their own rights as citizens of a liberal order. Mothers, like soldiers, cannot do whatever they want with their bodies, at least not in the post-*Roe v. Wade* environment. Of course, mothers do not receive the same benefits that soldiers do. But that is precisely the point: if the maternalist welfare state described by Skocpol had continued into this century, we could not have developed a modern

welfare state. We would have developed something much more like a modern army. Mothers would be supported by government, as would their children. But in return they would not be treated as liberal citizens. It is not clear that they would even have the right to vote.

It was women's suffrage that destroyed the maternalist welfare state. If women are citizens entitled to the rights enjoyed by all citizens, then among those rights—at least at the time about which Skocpol is writing—is freedom of contract. In *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* (1923), Justice Sutherland wrote that the passage of the woman's suffrage amendment meant that it was no longer possible to grant "restrictions on their liberty of contract which could not lawfully be imposed on men." In the peculiar language of the day, this meant that legislation restricting working hours for women was now as unconstitutional as it had been for men. The matter could not be clearer. Women can have protection or rights, but they cannot have both. Most women wanted the right to vote, but with it went the end of protective legislation.

If the ideology of separate spheres is incompatible with formal legal equality for women, it is also incompatible with the principle of universalism. How can spheres be separate when policies are pursued without respect to difference? Never mind that policies designed for women could not apply to men. Consider whether such policies could apply even to all women. For one thing, not all women are mothers. One could easily imagine working women who do not have children objecting to policies that benefit those who do have children as non-universalistic.

It is even harder to imagine such policies benefiting all mothers. The notion of separate spheres contained the implicit understanding that women were responsible for the family, which was composed of a wife, a husband, and children. Building a welfare state on that model would make the provision of benefits to unwed mothers on the same basis as married mothers enormously difficult. To be sure, unwed mothers also raise children in which society has a stake; but nineteenth-century efforts to help mothers were premised on an explicitly narrow vision of the nuclear family. That vision made possible governmental programs to help mothers, but they came with judgments about the moral behavior of the mothers who were helped. Dependency, as opposed to a liberal conception of citizenship, can be like that.

The ultimate question posed by Skocpol's book does not concern the nineteenth-century antecedents of the

welfare state. It concerns, rather, the basis for the provision of welfare. How many rights ought people to sacrifice in return for how many benefits? Is it more important to have the right to vote or to have a pension? Does the liberal notion of rights, including the right to one's own body, foreclose a communitarian obligation to others? Can social rights be provided in the absence of political rights, or will the absence of political rights mean that any social rights provided will be contingent and subject to reversal? The theoretical questions raised by Skocpol's account are fascinating, but she fails to address them adequately.

Every important treatment of the welfare state in recent years has been built around T.H. Marshall's seminal essay "Citizenship and Social Class." Marshall distinguished between economic, political, and social rights, each conveniently associated with one century since the eighteenth. Rights in property were established before the right to vote; and the right to vote made possible the preservation of the right to a decent life. Skocpol never discusses Marshall's essay in this book. If she had, she would have been forced to wonder whether the social rights won by women in the nineteenth century, in the absence of the political right to vote, were really worth winning. I am not prejudging the answer. We all might want to believe that the right to vote is more important—but that makes the case for providing an alternative point of view even more essential. Skocpol simply does not rise to this level. We are left with an account that, for all its length, is frustratingly incomplete.

IV.

Skocpol's treatment of the role played by independent women's organizations in the struggle for nineteenth-century social policies is no less interesting, and no less problematic. Her focus on organizations such as the National Congress of Mothers, the Consumers League, and other groups that fought the fight for protective legislation and the Children's Bureau makes it clear how important political mobilization is to accomplishment in social policy. Just because women did not have the right to vote did not mean that they were powerless and victimized. Their political capacities were, as Skocpol rightly emphasizes, astonishing. Especially in contrast to the conservatism of the labor movement at this time, the story of the woman's movement makes any believer in progress proud.

One can draw a number of conclusions from the story that Skocpol tells.

Surely one of them would be that things do not happen in politics in predetermined ways. They occur, rather, when real people take matters into their own hands, sensing opportunities and using their political and coalitional skills to maximize them. A second lesson, moreover, is that pressures from groups independent of government force political leaders to respond. I read the story of soldiers and mothers most profitably as an argument against structuralist and state-centered thinking in the social sciences.

The problem is that one of the leaders of structuralist and state-centered thinking has been... Theda Skocpol. She made her reputation with two ideas: that revolutions happen independent of the wishes and the talents of revolutionaries; and that states are actors in and of themselves, often leading social change from the top down rather than from the bottom up. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, therefore, raises the question of how much of Skocpol's previous theoretical contribution to the social sciences will have to be jettisoned to incorporate the stories told in her own book.

States and Social Revolutions (1979), Skocpol's first book, examined the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions in order to understand when and why they took place. It concluded that the breakdown of the old order "was not because of deliberate activities to that end, either on the part of avowed revolutionaries or on the part of politically powerful groups within the Old Regimes." Revolutions happened, rather, when the imperial states in these societies were unable to meet military and other challenges from outside, given their particular agrarian and precapitalist structure inside. Moreover, the story of a revolution is ironically the story of the state, for what emerged in all three cases was a stronger governmental system than the one offered by the old regime. Revolutionaries may think of themselves as a vanguard, intensifying the class contradictions that bring revolutions about, but they are really pawns in a structuralist universe. If the structural conditions are not ripe, Skocpol implied, there is no revolution.

One of the major targets of Skocpol's analysis in her first book was Marxism, or at least that kind of Marxism that did not recognize how states can act in autonomous ways not determined by the level of class forces. For Marxists, at least, this was important news; and the concept of the relative autonomy of the state became Skocpol's leitmotiv as she turned her attention more to the United States and the origins of the welfare state, a

research project that produced a number of important articles and culminated in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*. The hows and whys of the welfare state are quite similar to the hows and whys of revolutions, especially as Marxists and socialists began to give up on their hopes for revolution and looked instead to social democracy as their model.

Skocpol's perspective led her to challenge the way many writers understood the triumph of the welfare state, not only in America, but also in Europe. It was not the working class and the political power of labor that created the system of public benefits, but the actions of state officials. As she put it, in an article co-authored with Ann Shola Orloff, in 1984:

Overall we maintain that the politics of social welfare provision are just as much grounded in the process of statebuilding and the organization and reorganization of political life as in those socioeconomic processes—industrialization, urbanization, demographic change, and the formation of classes—that have traditionally been seen as basic to the development of the modern welfare state.

This took the notion of the relative autonomy of the state to new heights. Now the state could be understood not only as powerful enough to adjudicate between classes, but also as a force in its own right. *Bringing the State Back In* (the title of a collection of essays edited by Skocpol and others) tried to shift the debate away from "society" and toward "the state."



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The stories that Skocpol tells in her new book stand in significant tension with her earlier work. This need not be a defect; it can even be an advantage. But it becomes an advantage only when an author reflects back on her earlier work and provides a convincing account of why revisions were required. Skocpol, by contrast, tries to preserve her "state-centered" theorizing even while furnishing the evidence that contradicts it. "Because states are authoritative and resourceful organizations—collectors of revenue, centers of cultural authority, and hoarders of means of coercion—they are sites of autonomous action," she writes. This leads her to argue that, contrary to what many writers have claimed, there really was a state in late nineteenth-century America. (Unfortunately she makes her argument by redefining what a state is, not by demonstrating that government at that time reached into every aspect of social life.)

One could interpret these remarks as more dutiful than essential. What we really have in the new Skocpol is a criticism of the old Skocpol. There is very little discussion of the structuralist assumptions of her earlier book, yet clearly Skocpol is arguing here that American women made a difference, and that is a point of view that stands in sharp contrast

to her argument that Russian, French, and Chinese revolutionaries did not. Moreover, even the arguments for state autonomy are now presented as part of a complex causal chain that includes social forces. "I am not trying to substitute 'political determinism' for 'social determinism,'" she writes. She is correct. For *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* tries to find ways in which the activities of independent groups such as women's organizations "fit" the realities of governmental institutions and party systems. "We must make social policies the starting points as well as the end points of analysis. As politics creates policies, policies also remake politics."

I must confess to appreciating this new Skocpol. Painted in this book is a picture of reality far more humane and nuanced than the one for which she has been known. In her new picture, real people move across the stage, people who know that their actions and their emotions matter. Still, we need to be clear about something. The new Skocpol has not resolved the theoretical tensions that her shift in emphasis has produced. She achieves her new realism, and her new appreciation of contingency and chance, not by integrating the findings of her historical research with her previous theoretical claims, but simply by putting one

next to the other and blending them together even when they resist the mix. Social scientists are likely to be quoting Skocpol against Skocpol for some time.

Perhaps Skocpol should have ended on a downbeat note. To be sure, there are inspiring stories here, but they are stories of dubious victory or outright defeat. The dubious victory was that women won a political battle on their own initiative and by their own efforts, but at the cost of being treated as less than full citizens. The outright defeat was that they lost those benefits early or saw them reduced to poor

relief. We did *not* create a welfare state before the New Deal. We created a patronage machine, and then tried to protect women on terms more feudalistic than modern.

If the historical evidence speaks against the notion of a precocious nineteenth-century welfare state, it also suggests that the left's tendency constantly to discover one progressive historical agent after another is also flawed. Skocpol offers women as exemplary heroes—no different, in form, from the way in which an earlier generation of socialists lionized the working class. She describes her discovery of the role of gender as a "gestalt switch that enabled me to put together *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*." The discovery that women could play such a major role in social change "was like doing the last parts of a huge, complex jigsaw puzzle: the pieces were finally fitting together, and the emerging picture was (to me, at least) lovely."

But do pictures ever fit together quite so nicely? Historians generally caution against readings of the past that suggest only one clue that unravels a well-constructed story. One of the leading historians of this period, for example, is Linda Gordon, and the real question raised by these events, according to Gordon, is: "Why did women design inferior programs for women?" To answer that question, she insists, we must avoid "a romantic view of women's generosity and an overly dichotomized view of gender which in turn assumes a kind of unity among women that was never present." Although Gordon does not address this criticism to Skocpol, it would seem to apply. As Gordon concludes, appropriately citing Marshall, the social insurance advocates—primarily men—were the ones who moved closer to the idea of "social citizenship."

Even as she was deeply into the research for her book, Skocpol writes, "there was still no hint that gender would play a central role in my understanding of U.S. political history." By promoting gender to the center of her story, Skocpol is able to have "positive stories to tell." Yet what a price she pays. Although there is much to admire in the upper-class women who devoted so much of their energies to social improvement, it strains credibility to believe that they were completely altruistic. An earlier generation of social scientists—Edward Banfield, James Q. Wilson, Robert Merton, Richard Hofstadter—taught us to question the motives of Protestant reformers bent on straightening out the character of the many and the unfortunate. Determined to rewrite the history of the welfare state in a way

The Farmer's Mistress

The trees gave nothing away—he might not come again, tracking mud on her clean grass, though night spilled over the bluff, licked the steps where she sat, skirt smoothed down over her knees.

Behind her in the house, the clean dishes stood up straight, back-to-front, in the drain-rack. Her ironed dresses hung like a cotton frieze from the pantry door-molding. In the bedroom

she'd turned the mattress over. He might not come bearing a fistful of weeds, an innertube to drape, deflated, over the fence like swimtrunks. One night he'd left three live, speckled trout

frantic in the sink—their flat eyes tilted when she turned the light on. Once he'd simply stood at the door, hair plastered flat, cupped hands spilling the water he offered. Some nights

the skiff knocked its exhausted secret knock against the pilings, meaning nothing. The river gave him up or not, like an apology. Given or withheld, did it matter?

Beyond the trees, the river shrugged at the bank. What did it know? Her tea glass sweating a ring on the step, she sat pleating a fold of her hem to show the row of trees she was not waiting.

SALLY THOMAS

that preserves a role for reformers (and, to a lesser degree, for state officials), Skocpol ignores the skeptics and plunges ahead, oblivious of the fact that not all statist reformers were quite so honorable.

Skocpol brings enormous energy, a fine sense of narrative, and a wealth of historical data to her task. But nothing in

her story forces us to reconsider the way the welfare state eventually came to the United States. It came in the form of the New Deal; and it came, and continued to develop, at a slower and less comprehensive pace than it did in Europe. If the conceit of American exceptionalism is to survive at all, it will have to find a better champion. •

Trial and Error

BY MICHAEL SCAMMELL

The Porcupine by Julian Barnes

(Knopf, 138 pp., \$17)

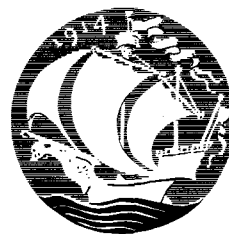
In the twelve years since he gave up writing detective stories for serious fiction, Julian Barnes has earned an enviable reputation as one of England's most interesting and provocative novelists. Beginning with *Metroland* in 1980, he has gone on to produce five more novels, ranging from dazzlingly reflexive metafiction like *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* to postmodernist fables like *Staring at the Sun* and *Talking It Over*. Throughout his work Barnes has displayed a remarkable versatility, equally at home with old-fashioned mimesis and abstract speculation, able to mix naturalistic mimicry with outrageous farce, and all with a Gallic elegance, a dashing wit, and a sense of irony that keeps his wonderfully idiosyncratic creations under tight control.

Within his eclectic body of work, certain topics seem to stand out as more or less permanent obsessions. One is a preoccupation with conflicting points of view, which found its most diverting expression in his last novel, *Talking It Over*, in which the three protagonists recollect events from their different perspectives in a series of overlapping monologues that are juxtaposed, but never turn into dialogue. A related preoccupation is the relationship between fact and fiction—in all senses of the latter word. In his breakthrough novel, *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes intricately dramatized the difficulties lurking in the path of even the most sophisticated biographer in search of his subject, while reflecting on the nature of truth and the nature of art, and the slippery relationship between them. In *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* he pursued this investigation a step further, interweaving the stories of real charac-

ters involved in real events with imaginary people in imagined situations, and combining them in such a way as to challenge the reader's ability to distinguish history from fable and self-deception from knowledge.

Now, in his short seventh novel (in length and form it is really a novella), Barnes has combined both these interests by turning from universal history to a particular and topical instance of it: the recent upheavals in Eastern Europe and the dilemmas faced by post-Communist societies in coming to terms with their pasts. The story is set in an unnamed country whose history, geography, and inhabitants' names closely resemble those of Bulgaria, though it appears to stand for any country in a similar predicament. The plot is almost wholly taken up with a judicial, verbal, and psychological duel between the deposed Communist leader and former dictator of the country, called Stoyo Petkanov, and his ideological opponent, Peter Solinsky, public prosecutor in the new government.

The central situation in the novel reflects a dilemma common to most ex-Communist countries in Eastern Europe. After some hesitation, the new government has decided to put Petkanov on trial and make a lesson of him. Solinsky's task is to secure a conviction, and in such a way that not only Petkanov personally but also his entire Communist regime is symbolically indicted, thus providing a catharsis for the people. Solinsky's hands are tied, however, by a decision on the part of the new leadership to observe strict legality, and to draw a moral and political line between itself and the old regime. This means that instead of instituting Nuremberg-style proceedings against Petkanov for



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the crimes committed by his dictatorship, Solinsky is obliged to limit himself to much lesser charges based on actions that could be shown to be illegal under Petkanov's own constitution and legal code, namely official deception, abuse of authority, and mismanagement.

The ensuing duel between the two men takes place in a series of one-on-one meetings in the apartment where Petkanov has been detained, and also in the open court where "Case Number One" unfolds. Petkanov is a tough, foul-mouthed, unscrupulous, and still committed Communist who has held undisputed power for thirty years and retains his arrogance in the face of the charges brought against him. He mocks and patronizes Solinsky, a former Party member and more recently a law professor, as a failure and a nonentity, motivated by ambition and personal spite. Solinsky, by contrast, is timid and tentative, only occasionally capable of losing his temper, and all too aware of his checkered past and questionable credentials as a reformer, which makes him emblematic of the nation as a whole:

In fact, he oscillated constantly between different levels of anxiety, and his intermittent thrusts of decisiveness were intended to allay the fret and stew within him. If nations can behave like individuals, he was an individual who behaved like a nation: enduring decades of edgy submissiveness, then bursting into revolt, eager for fresh rhetoric and a renewed image of himself.

Solinsky is dominated by Petkanov both on stage (in court) and off (in Petkanov's apartment) and is made to look publicly ridiculous when the bullying Petkanov reveals that he had once sent Solinsky to Italy as part of a delegation, and that Solinsky had spent his hard currency allowance on a prostitute and a shiny Italian suit. Solinsky is publicly humiliated, but resolves to fight back. Until now he has resisted the blandishments of General Ganin of the Security Service to accept faked documents showing that Petkanov's daughter, who had died of a mysterious heart ailment at the age of 40, had in fact been murdered on the orders of her father. Driven to desperation by his failure in court, Solinsky decides to use the documents. Shortly thereafter he earns national fame for driving Petkanov into a corner and making a show of the latter's monstrous cruelty and corruption. Petkanov understands that the documents must have been falsified, since he would never have signed his name to anything that would incriminate him directly, but there is nothing he can do about it. Although the charge of murder is not formally added to the indictment, his air of invincibility has been punctured; it

becomes inevitable that lesser charges against him will now stick without difficulty.

Solinsky appears to have turned the tables on his opponent, but in a final private confrontation between the two men in Petkanov's room, the old dictator recovers his former arrogance and rubs in the true meaning of Solinsky's supposed triumph. By resorting to unscrupulous methods to convict Petkanov, Solinsky has succumbed to the very evil he is supposed to be fighting; he has resorted to the same sort of corrupt means that he detests in the old regime. "You cannot get rid of me," sneers Petkanov. "This farce of a trial makes no difference. Lying about me, saying I was only hated and feared, not loved, that will make no difference. You can't get rid of me. Do you see?" The literal outcome of the trial (which we do not learn) becomes irrelevant. The old regime will not disappear overnight. It is destined to live on in the new, despite pious declarations of fundamental change. "I sentence you," says Petkanov at their last meeting. "I sentence you."

With this final scene, we are in familiar Barnes territory. As a lover of paradox and a committed skeptic (Barnes would appreciate the oxymoron), he wishes to question the common view that the fall of communism in Eastern Europe has been an unmixed blessing, that it will lead automatically to a more just and democratic order. The point is reasonable, but the reader is surprised to discover that that is about all there is. It is nowhere near as arresting or original an idea as those that came spilling out of *Flaubert's Parrot* and the other novels, nor is it buttressed by other ideas of particular note. Moreover, the book has a peculiar subtext that calls the validity of even this thought into question.

The problem can best be illustrated by considering the portraits of the two main protagonists, Petkanov and Solinsky. Although Barnes attempts to get inside the heads of both men, it is clearly the figure of Petkanov that attracts and interests him more. He pays lip service to the idea that Petkanov has committed horrible crimes in the past, but the reader is never confronted with any direct evidence of this; indeed, the only crime directly discussed (the alleged murder of Petkanov's daughter) is deliberately shrouded in doubt, since the evidence for it depends on forged documents.

Instead we are presented with an endearing picture of a rugged, hearty, indomitable Communist scrapper, still fit in his 70s, capable of dominating not only his inquisitor but an entire court-

room and, through television, an entire country with the power of his will. It is true that he lies and likes to hit below the belt, but these excesses are shrugged off as being for the sake of an ideology he truly believes in. Even his foul tongue has a rough charm to it. In the scheme of the novel, as in a David Mamet play (and Barnes rivals Mamet in the quantity of expletives he deploys), the word "fuck" symbolizes manliness and *cojones*, and we are supposed to glimpse the desperate dignity beneath the rage.

Cojones, it turns out, are just what Solinsky lacks. He is not just a Hamlet, he is also a turncoat, a former Communist who left the Party for the "Greens" at the most propitious moment, and made a career for himself in the opposition. He is a vacillating wimp, an intellectual tortured by self-doubt, and although he can be driven to fits of righteous anger by Petkanov's taunts and evasions, he is impotent to act on his fury. He is symbolically impotent in another sense too, since his wife, Maria, the materialistic daughter of a martyred Communist hero who was once an ally of Petkanov's, improbably refuses to sleep with him after hearing about the Italian prostitute, and later decides, even more improbably, to leave him after Solinsky's use of the forged documents. "I can't love you anymore, and after today I doubt that I can even respect you.... It's a show trial, Peter. Just the modern version. A show trial, that's all." Solinsky's victory is shown to be pyrrhic in a double sense: he loses not only his honor but also his woman.

Backing up this cast of principals are "the people," represented somewhat perfunctorily by a "chorus" of three students, who watch the proceedings on television, and the elderly grandmother of one of them who refuses to watch on principle. Like Petkanov, the students also express themselves largely through the medium of four-letter words. But in this case the expletives are emblematic of helpless rage (impotence again) at Petkanov, since the students have nothing articulate to say against him. The wise old granny, by contrast, remains faithful to the Party and communism. She is last seen, in the symbolic vignette with which the novel ends, standing in the rain holding a portrait of Lenin:

Rain bubbled the image, but his indelible face pursued each passer-by. Occasionally a committed drunk or some chattering thrush of a student would shout across at the old woman, at the thin light veering off the wet glass. But whatever the words, she stood her ground, and she remained silent.

It would be simpleminded to conclude that Barnes is rooting for the old

woman and Leninism. Not ideologically at any rate, any more than he is endorsing the party line of Petkanov when he impersonates the latter ruminating on Gorbachev's perestroika and cursing the Soviet leader for betraying communism. They are part of the play. But emotionally and subliminally it's a different story. Barnes is so carried away by his main character that he weighs the scales in his favor, privileging Petkanov's utopian ideals, however twisted, and power politics, however unscrupulous, over Solinsky's democratic doubts and tortured moralism.

To confirm that this is the case, it is enough to compare the fictional dictator with his real-life prototype. In a recent article in *The New Yorker*, Barnes indicated that it was indeed Bulgaria that had served as his inspiration for writing *The Porcupine*, and that it was the trial of Bulgaria's former leader, Todor Zhivkov (the first such trial of an Eastern European leader), that had caught his novelistic imagination. It is not clear from Barnes's remarks if he had seen translated transcripts of the trial. (I have not seen any myself.) But what does exist is the transcript of an extended interview with Zhivkov conducted by a Bulgarian reporter between December 1990 and February 1991, while Zhivkov was still under investigation, which was broadcast by Sofia News in English a couple of months later.

A comparison of this interview with Barnes's narrative shows that Barnes has captured the tone of Zhivkov's voice, and some elements of his personality, with considerable accuracy, including the braggadocio and the slipperiness, the vehemence and the vagueness, and above all the complacent and egocentric conviction in his own rightness. But there are some crucial and suggestive differences. Zhivkov does not speak (let alone, one imagines, think) in Marxist-Leninist jargon. That stuff is generally saved for Party conferences and public meetings, as Barnes might have discovered had he looked at, say, Khrushchev's memoirs. Zhivkov did not, on this occasion, pour scorn on Gorbachev for ideological weakness while praising his predecessors: on the contrary, he criticized Khrushchev and Brezhnev and pointedly avoided attacking Gorbachev directly, even when invited to do so. He also claimed to be on the verge of introducing his own version of perestroika when removed from office.

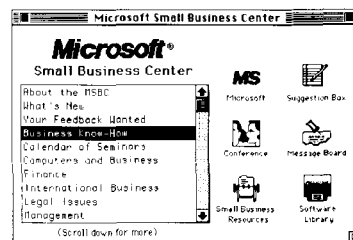
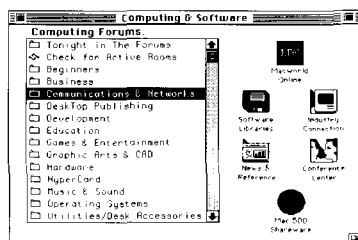
Repeated denials in the press interview throw an interesting light on another set of disparities between Zhivkov and Barnes's Petkanov. In the

interview Zhivkov denies responsibility for such episodes as the forced immigration of 300,000 Bulgarian Muslims to Turkey, when hundreds who resisted were killed or tortured. He denies other charges of repressing political opponents and intellectuals, even when the reporter conducting the interview points out that she was one of the individuals affected. He lies repeatedly, squirms, and wriggles, and his righteous anger alternates with pathetic attempts to ingratiate himself and lapses into giggles. In a typical exchange, Zhivkov is asked why he was so keen on "interrogations, detentions, searches," and expelling people from the Party. "Whom

did we expel?" responds Zhivkov, "Ha-ha-ha!" The reporter tells him the names. Zhivkov: "Eh! (sighs) Well then! How could you become heroes otherwise! It's not that easy to become a hero! Ha-ha-ha! (bang on the armchair)."

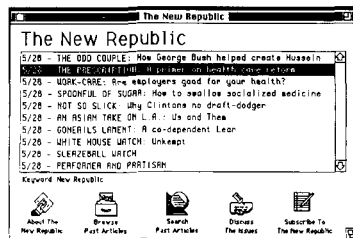
It is this sordid shiftiness, the cynical disregard for facts, the blatant readiness to change versions of the past, and the insinuating alternation of bluster with whining, so recognizably present in the real live Zhivkov, that is lost in Barnes's version of a dictator at bay. Equally significant is the absence in the novel of a worthy opponent to Petkanov. If even a reporter can expose the dictator's lies, reveal his clay feet and call his bluff, are

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we to expect that a public prosecutor cannot do likewise? Is he to lie down and retreat in confusion when Petkanov tells the world about his Italian suit and night with a prostitute? For that matter, what Eastern European politico worth his salt would *not* have bought a suit and slept with a whore while on a rare visit to the capitalist West? Surely even an average lawyer would have had the gumption to expose Petkanov's network of informers to ridicule, rather than caving in to ridicule himself.

Barnes, of course, cannot be held to account for not portraying the historical Zhivkov. As he wrote in *The New Yorker*, "I'd used the outline of the Zhivkov trial (plus various specifics), borrowed the country's topography, and then gone off on my own." But he can be held accountable for historical plausibility, since he intends *The Porcupine* to be a serious comment on contemporary Eastern Europe. The curious thing about his scenario is that it is eerily replete with the stock figures of socialist realism: the feisty, can-do commissar, ready to cut corners and maybe commit crimes for the sake of the larger good; the wimpy intellectual, full of doubts and moral scruples, and hypocritical in his self-righteousness; the good woman, instinctively able to distinguish vice from virtue and bestow her love accordingly; and the wise old woman, able to see further than impetuous younger folk. Even the texture of the prose (apart from one or two set-piece descriptions of demonstrations) seems coarse and inexpressive by comparison with Barnes's earlier works. This may derive in part from the strain of inhabiting, for large stretches of the book, the mind of a vulgar political bully. It may also reflect an instinctive groping for a form appropriate to this unfamiliar and still Communistic society on the edge of Europe.

In the matter of form it seems likely that Barnes was also influenced by the example of Arthur Koestler, with whom he became friendly toward the end of the latter's life. *The Porcupine's* opening has definite echoes of *Darkness at Noon*, and the central idea of a psychological and ideological duel between two political opponents, both former Communists and former allies, recalls the confrontation between Rubashov and his interrogator in Koestler's novel. Koestler, however, had the benefit of having himself been a Communist and been intimate with the Communist mentality, not to speak of having been in jail. In *Darkness at Noon* he symbolically placed his former self on trial and pronounced his own death sentence. Such a profound

identification with the subject is probably beyond someone who has never endured similar experiences, and while it would be absurd to demand experience as the condition of artistic creation, imagination has to be all the more profound and convincing to make up for the lack.

The attempt to narrate events from the inside marks an uncharacteristic tactical error on Barnes's part. Whereas the many other Western novelists who have written about Eastern Europe in recent years (Roth, Bellow, Updike, Malcolm Bradbury) have filtered their narratives through Western eyes, Barnes has attempted the far harder (and probably impossible) task of impersonating a native, and that seems to have been his undoing. Barnes also seems to have ignored the recipe for authorial detachment recommended in *A*

History of the World in 10½ Days:

When tempted by didacticism, the writer should imagine a spruce sea captain eyeing the storm ahead, bustling from instrument to instrument . . . , expelling crisp orders down the speaking tube. But there is nobody below decks; the engine room was never installed, and the rudder broke off centuries ago.

This signature tone of civilized irony is unfortunately missing from *The Porcupine*. There is no engine in the engine room, and the ship has gone adrift. Barnes for once seems to have lost control of his vessel. It may be easier to navigate the depths of world history than the shoals of communism in its death throes.

MICHAEL SCAMMELL, professor of Russian literature at Cornell University, is writing a biography of Arthur Koestler.

Pop Goes the Artist

BY JED PERL

What Did I Do? The Unauthorized Autobiography by Larry Rivers, with Arnold Weinstein

(HarperCollins, 498 pp., \$30)

Will *What Did I Do?* do the trick, the trick being to reinvigorate the career of Larry Rivers, a '60s art world celebrity who is on the verge of being forgotten? The title of this rambling, gossipy, sporadically amusing autobiography is, I suspect, something more than a rhetorical flourish. Rivers has written this big book in order to plead for a second chance in the limelight, and the question mark at the end of the title is probably only three-quarters tongue-in-cheek. Very few artists would turn down the opportunity of becoming a celebrity with an attentive public, but it is not pleasant to discover firsthand that what the public giveth the public can just as easily taketh away. Rivers is tough and smart enough to have gotten through it all more or less intact, but survival hasn't brought him serenity; it seems to have put him in a panic. Perhaps the trouble is that Rivers is a fan who became a celebrity and then found that he was suited to neither the one role nor the other.

Here, in any event, is an artist who is still, at past 60 and with a lot of living under his belt, asking other people if he's doing O.K. In the eyes of the world he's done O.K.—not as well as some oth-

ers who came up in the '50s, such as Jasper Johns, but O.K. His *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1953) is widely celebrated as one of the first uses of pop iconography in postwar American art. The Emanuel Leutze canvas on which the Rivers picture was based hadn't been taken seriously as a painting for generations before Rivers came along; and that was the point. Rivers wanted to amuse his audience by invoking the status of Leutze's picture as an American icon.

He wanted to do something else as well. He repainted the pop icon in a painterly style—a style that was inspired by abstract expressionism and was meant to strike viewers as being seriously lyrical. The message of the painting was, "I'm kidding but then again I'm not kidding," and this has been Rivers's message ever since. In the first half of the '60s he did a series of paintings based on the Dutch Masters cigar box that has a reproduction of a Rembrandt on its lid. Here Rivers's what-am-I-doing? routine got even more convoluted. He was pointing out that the cigar manufacturer had turned a Rembrandt into an advertisement, and then he was trying to turn the advertisement back into something beautiful and painterly—into

something like a Rembrandt.

The cultural overlays and juxtapositions to which Rivers points in his early work do have their smidge of surprise, even if artists had said most of what there was to say about the clash of high and low culture long before Rivers came on the scene. Like the surrealists before him, Rivers wanted to show how different parts of the culture react to one another, and there's no doubt that when pop culture has a feeding frenzy with the classics the results can have a kind of subversive allure. Nor do the classics necessarily lose out. The Dutch Masters cigar box demonstrates the reverse: that the classics are indomitable, even when they're presented in a debased commercial form.

Joseph Cornell's surrealist constructions, which are contemporaneous with Rivers's first pop pictures, play on some of these popular apprehensions and misapprehensions of high culture. But Cornell doesn't make too much of the connections; he just includes them among the furnishings of his personal dreams. Rivers, by contrast, doesn't know the meaning of discretion. He puffs things up, he presents flyweight cultural observations as epic visions, he fogs everything over with that watery lyricism of his. Every painting he does is a two-step: it's pop trash but it's more than pop trash. The message of Rivers's work is that what you see isn't what you get. In this book he presents his life as a series of overlapping fragments, and a reader is left wondering if the real Rivers will ever stand up. To his friends, his never having made peace with anything may be an aspect of his charm, but it's the charm of the eternal adolescent. In an autobiography, parading one's insecurities can be unseemly.

A reader opens the memoirs of this artist who knew some version of everybody in the '50s and '60s expecting the scoop. One wants Rivers to deliver and get on with it, but instead he circles, round and round. One of the reasons for the book's appearance just now may be that Rivers, a father several times over, several times married, had an affair with the poet Frank O'Hara in the '50s. O'Hara, an emblematic figure of '50s New York who died after being run over on Fire Island in 1966, is the subject of a long-discussed and long-delayed biography by Brad Gooch, now scheduled to come out in June. Perhaps Rivers is afraid, now that his paintings aren't much in evidence, that the public will begin to think of him as just another of Frank's interesting boyfriends. *What Did I Do?* could be meant as a pre-emptive first strike.

But Rivers belabors his bisexuality, and what is presented as his attempt to grasp the mentality of his younger self ends up sounding like a bid for approval. What Rivers doesn't understand is that we don't approve or disapprove, we just want to know what it was like to know O'Hara. About this Rivers tells little, and what he does tell is eclipsed by the probably honest but undoubtedly unnecessary remark that "sex with Frank—I'll spare you the details—was not very thrilling." "Having a coke with you," O'Hara announced in one of his poems about young men and young love, "is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne..." Is there any question as to why, whatever went on in bed with Frank, a lot of guys would consider giving it a try? O'Hara is so much more generous than Rivers. It is Rivers who is keeping score. We hear much too much about how irresistible he was and remains. His whole bloody book is one non-stop attempt to demonstrate that he wins the New York hipster sweepstakes.

We read on not because Rivers is interesting but because, as he tells us time and again, he's passed through interesting times. *What Did I Do?* covers more than half a century, from Rivers's childhood in the Bronx (he was born in 1925;

his father had a small trucking business) to the international celebrity of the '60s and beyond. But the emotional center of the book is in the roughly fifteen years from the late '40s to the early '60s, the years when the New York art world was inventing itself. In the '40s Rivers was a wild kid with no money, blowing a saxophone. He played in the Air Corps Swing Band, was discharged from the service on account of a minor neurological problem, enrolled in Juilliard, joined the Johnny Morris Big Band. He toured with the band, got married, had a kid, did a lot of drugs.

A fellow musician, Jack Freilicher, was married to the painter Jane Freilicher, and it was she who got Rivers started on painting. In 1947 Rivers was studying at Hans Hofmann's school. It was a time when poetry and painting were beginning to have some of the hipster allure that had belonged to jazz in the '40s, and Rivers slid right into the new scene. He joined in with the boozy goings-on at the Cedar Tavern, and from then on he was a part of the art world party that some would say ended when O'Hara died and others believe is still going strong.

The '50s was the period when artists in New York first saw themselves as a force that the world would have to

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reckon with. This was a good thing and a bad thing. It was good in the sense that it rid artists of the guilty conscience that comes with provincialism: it enabled them to act with a new freedom of imagination. Younger artists could benefit from the expansive mood. A strong example is the late Joan Mitchell, whose abstract paintings of the mid-'50s, done when she was scarcely 30, demonstrate a painterly ease and confidence that would have been unimaginable in any earlier period in New York City.

But confidence could also breed a dangerous kind of self-consciousness. In the '50s more than one artist tried to predetermine his place in history by editing his subject matter and his style so that the work would have a simple, highly legible shape. Rivers found his signature style in 1953 and stuck to it. And older artists did the same. Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko came into the '50s with work that had some tension and variety to it; they were juggling different ideas, they were trying to do something more complex. By the end of the decade their work had only one note; they had sacrificed richness and variety to an increasingly rigid idea of artistic personality. They wanted to be remembered for one thing.

Self-consciousness was not just a personal matter. There was also a kind of communal self-consciousness, which found expression in the decade's grand nostalgic metaphor. People were irresistibly drawn to possible parallels between contemporary New York and the Paris of forty years earlier. Clement Greenberg had already compared Pollock's paintings of the late '40s to the analytical cubist paintings that Picasso and Braque were doing around 1912. So the first generation of abstract expressionists was seen as America's equivalent of the heroic School of Paris. Once that was established, it was easy to argue that the crowd that arrived in New York after World War II echoed the Parisians of the '20s, the generation that had stood on giants' shoulders and been more easy-going, less acquainted with struggle than the artists before the war. Amid the glam-

our of this new Silver Age Frank O'Hara was said to play the Jean Cocteau role. And Larry Rivers, well, isn't he the Pascin of our time?

Rivers's career was launched by John Bernard Myers, who, as director of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, did the same for Fairfield Porter, Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Alfred Leslie, and a number of other bright figures of the '50s. Rivers had a kind of avant-garde career that would have been impossible even a decade earlier: it was fast paced, supported by sympathetic critics and a

it has nothing to do with paints, brushes, and canvases. But I suspect that the absence of a serious discussion of painting also reflects the reality of a period when the art scene was besotted, but not necessarily by art.

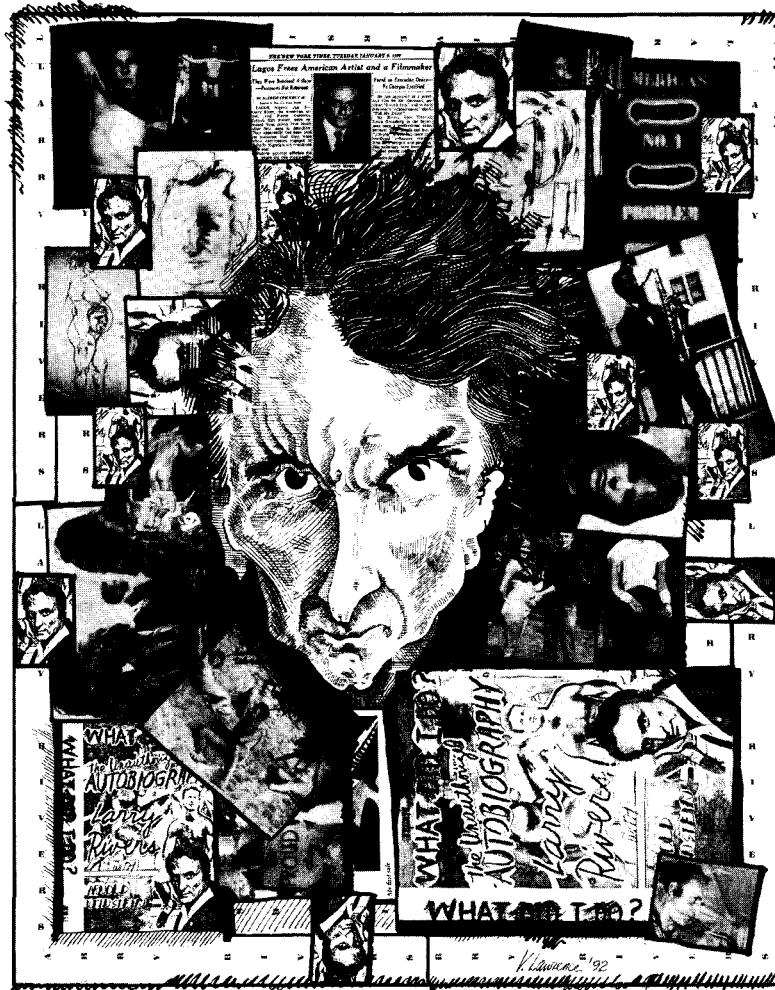
The artistic license of the '50s seems to have liberated nothing deep in Rivers, just the general thought that he could do it, too. His life's work isn't much. Some of his very early paintings, interiors in a heavy-keyed color obviously inspired by Bonnard, won the praise of Greenberg. Rivers ruefully records how

Greenberg later took it back, and in this instance Greenberg was right not once but twice. Those very early works are the only ones in which Rivers actually tries to hold together a painting, and they're not all that special. After that, Rivers didn't evolve toward a different style, he just seems to have stumbled on the idea of treating a painting as a half-finished sketch, and from 1953 onward this was the way he painted.

In this signature style of Rivers's that emerged with the *Washington* painting, fragments of color and drawing are poised like puzzle pieces, and we are no doubt meant to feel that it is all a metaphor for our fragmented, puzzling times. The work is suggestive—for a long time gallery-goers were happy to be teased by it—but suggestions are not art. Rivers did variations, causing a stir with nude portraits of O'Hara, of his son Joseph, and of Berdie, his mother-in-law, who

turned out to be a far longer-running member of the Rivers household than his first wife. The work is all minor shock effects, fragmented frissons. (If you want to know what happens when you paint a portrait of your adolescent son in the nude and then exhibit it, buy this book.)

There's no internal engine that drives Rivers's work. It's all fad and fancies. In the '60s he did big theme works—a history of the Russian Revolution, a history of the Jews—and they're just extensions of the old sketch idea. (The Russian Revolution piece, over thirty-two-feet long, is the Long March of sketches.) And then he was off into alternative media—vinyl,



LARRY RIVERS BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

new generation of dealers and collectors. Rivers knew how to take advantage of what came his way. He is one of those neurotics who has never been held back by his misgivings; in the '50s he leapt before he looked, and that was undoubtedly the right way to be in that particular time and place. Options were opening up very fast. As for art-as-art, it was not a subject that seems to have been much on Rivers's mind, at least from the evidence of the autobiography. This can in part be accounted for by the author's obvious desire to write a best seller: the best-seller crowd wants to know what artists do in their studios only so long as

plex—the refuge of the painter who has nothing on his mind. By the end of the book, Rivers is traveling more than he's painting, getting involved in movies and all those other things that have such a powerful appeal for celebrity artists who never had much of a sense of what to do in the studio in the first place.

The bohemia of the '50s and early '60s is a hot topic these days. At the SoHo Guggenheim in New York City there's a show of Rauschenberg's work of the '50s; the National Gallery in Washington is showing the work that Ellsworth Kelly did in Paris in the '50s; and "Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955-1962" is beginning a nationwide tour at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. A biography of Fairfield Porter is just out, as is a book by April Kingsley, *The Turning Point*, that focuses on the year 1950. Numerous studies of the beat poets and the literary scene in the '50s cover overlapping territory. In part all of this reflects a hunger for fresh topics, but it is also natural for every generation to want to know what their elders were doing when they were young. Today New York's '50s bohemia is exerting a fascination not unlike the fascination that Bloomsbury exerted a generation ago. The minutiae of earlier lives are recycled as scholarly gossip, and the earlier generation is felt to provide models of bohemian behavior even as it functions as a sort of chic soap opera substitute for the excitement that people find missing in their own workaday lives.

What Did I Do? is full of thumbnail sketches of artists who were there in the '50s and are, many of them, still around. Rivers knows a lot of interesting people—people like Nell Blaine, the brilliant young abstractionist who was born in Virginia, got herself to New York so she could study with Hofmann, exemplified for many the high spirits of the '50s, and eventually became one of the finest still-life painters that this country has ever produced. If one comes to this book with a solid familiarity with the period, there can be some pleasure in having the period details filled in. Like the recent Jackson Pollock biography by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, the Rivers memoir includes, willy-nilly, illuminating snapshots of people and events, bits and pieces of information that we didn't have before. (Blaine is a bit player in the Pollock biography as well.)

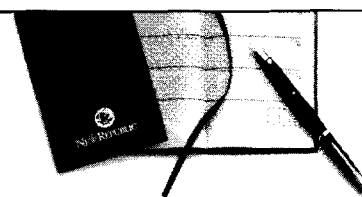
But neither of these books places the secondary characters in a way that would make them vivid to the general reader. I can't help wondering what most people will make of a lot of the material in

Rivers's book. They'll probably just find themselves skipping ahead, to the next sexy part. There is certainly less that is interesting in the latter parts of the book, probably because as Rivers became more famous his circle of friends became less interesting. (When he starts explaining his interest in younger and younger girls, I wish he'd keep some of his private life private.) Part of what is maddening about the book—and maybe about Rivers's paintings, too—is that one gets the feeling that he has the brains to do better if only he wanted to try. He has a genuine curiosity about people and the world, but it's always overwhelmed by his self-absorption. This is an autobiography in which the author quotes his loved ones on what a great guy he is.

Mostly, *What Did I Do?* is about a charming, attractive, up-for-anything young man, and how he made it in the big glamorous art world. I suppose the book will be closely read in SoHo, where the current mix of brazen careerism and studied skepticism isn't entirely different from the mood that prevailed when Rivers was an art star in the mid-'60s. Who hasn't known some version of this manic personality? Paranoid, euphoric, hungry for self-exposure, he is the middle-class guy who will dabble on the edge of the abyss but through it all remain far too sane ever to slip over the edge. He meant to put all of this into his art, and the politest way to explain his failure is by saying that life got in the way.

Just now Rivers is doing portraits of great artists at work—mooning over the giants who once walked the earth. The last color plate in his autobiography reproduces two recent portraits of Picasso. These works (done in pencil and colored pencil on sculpted foam-board: Rivers keeps those media mixing) show the old Picasso at work, a paintbrush in his hand. This is the Picasso who, isolated in a chateau in the south of France, was creating his last, astonishing bacchic visions in the very years when Rivers was making his way through the New York bacchanal. In Picasso's uproariously, terrifyingly erotic series of etchings, *Suite 347*, there from time to time appears a dark, eager young man. It's a young man not unlike the early Larry Rivers: nicely built, clever, with a few tricks stored up, ready to take his place in the bacchanal that is all he knows and all he wants to know.

JED PERL is the author of *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) and is at work on *New Art City*, a study of the art scene in New York from 1950 to 1970.



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CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

Durable ideology

RUTH WISSE IS KNOWN LARGELY for her elegant writings on Yiddish literature. Next month she will take up her post as the incumbent of Harvard's first chair in the field. Nothing controversial in any of this. Her recent book, *If I Am Not for Myself...*, is, however, not at all about the culture of the Jews but about the political culture amid which Jews live, and this book is very controversial. Readers may recall Robert Alter's quite hostile review, "Enemies, A Love Story," in the November 30 issue of TNR. Although I think Wisse's argument here and there a bit overstated, its central claim—that liberals, Jewish liberals included, are inclined to avert their gaze and even explain away the anti-Semitism of Arabs (or, for that matter, of many American blacks)—is virtually indisputable. (Liberals are less kind to the likes of Pat Buchanan.) Alter's review actually is a case in point of the tendency to mitigate. Jew-hatred, he asserts, does not feed the Arab (and Islamic) war against Zionism; it is instead one of that war's consequences. Granted, the theological obsession of Christian Europe with the "perfidious Jews" was never equaled among the Arabs. And Arab persecution of the Jews also never reached the demonic thoroughness of the Nazis. But Hitlerism is not the measure of anti-Semitism; if it were, there'd be no anti-Semitism before or since. And besides, Alter argues something different: that whatever adversity Jews suffered in the Middle East did "not arise naturally from the matrix of Arab cultural identity." Cold comfort. And also false. The Prophet himself offered the Jews of the Hijaz either conversion or exile or conversion or death. In 629 the Jews of Khaybar got a better deal: they simply had to hand over half their agricultural product to the Muslims, and subsequently special taxes as symbols of subordination. In ninth-century Baghdad the caliph forced the Jews to don the yellow star, an ordinance adopted later by, yes, the Nazis. In 1066 thousands of Jews were massacred by the Arab faithful in Grenada, and there were reprises of such killings right into our time. Alter says that what looks like contemporary Arab anti-Semitism is only a response to the Jews' observably creating a state "in a

country ... thought of as indigenously Arab." But Arab nationalism does not explain why, for example, in 1941, seven years before statehood, there were pogroms from North Africa to Iraq, precisely when the Nazis were gearing up for the final solution.

I BELIEVE ANTI-SEMITISM AND anti-Zionism are not different phenomena. Anti-Zionists believe the Jewish people is the one nation in the world not entitled to self-determination, and that exclusion is certainly anti-Semitic. In any case those who are "merely" anti-Zionist routinely make common cause with anti-Semites. In the United States many Arab organizations do joint ventures with the notorious Liberty Lobby. Tehran-funded Radio Islam has just scheduled a conference in Europe co-sponsored by various militant Palestinian groups and a motley assortment of Central and Eastern European fascists. The subject: Did the Holocaust happen? Louis Farrakhan is one of the participants.

THERE'S BEEN STRIFE BETWEEN Hasidim and blacks of Crown Heights for a long time now. In 1991 a black child was accidentally killed by a car driven by a Lubavitcher Hasid. Revenge was visited on an innocent Australian visitor, Yankel Rosenbaum, by a mob of some thirty young black men. He was not the only victim. But his murder brought home to the local Jews that the authorities can't or won't protect them from violence. For three days that summer young toughs, many screaming "Heil Hitler," terrorized the ultra-Orthodox of the neighborhood, and for three days the police didn't halt the terror. In October 1992 the young man charged with Rosenbaum's killing was acquitted by a largely black jury, some of whom partied with the defendant after the verdict, although no one disputes he was among the avenging mob. This month acolytes of the Lubavitcher Rebbe beat up a black man, saying they'd caught him in a robbery. If that's true, they should have held him for the cops; and maybe it's not true, even though he's got a long criminal record and admits to carrying tools that look like a thief's. Mayor David Dinkins has been caught in the crosswinds. He is no anti-Semite, and no one—most notably no Jewish leader—has called him one. But he is being criticized, and he deserves the criticism. The fact is he hadn't sent in the cops when they

were needed in 1991 (and not only then), and he didn't send them in because he was afraid to confront the black populace of Crown Heights. Which is why czarist authorities looked away while the Cossacks committed their pogroms.

HASIDIM, BEING OUR *OSTJUDEN*, ghosts out of our pre-Enlightenment pasts, give *New York Times* Jews like me the willies. They're clannish and closed-minded. (See Allan Nadler's review, "Last Exit to Brooklyn," May 4.) But they have very low crime rates and they work and pay taxes, a little strange for New York. They've now learned to defend themselves, seeking allies among other ethnic New Yorkers—Italians, Irish, Asians, Greeks—who are repelled by the utter collapse of the social contract but won't flee. The folks who don't take the subways or live in Brooklyn (like the high Jews of the American Jewish

Congress) say the fears of the Hasidim are exaggerated and that the anti-Semitism they experience is more phobic than real. *Tout va bien*, if only the blackcoats and sidecurls would shut up. Jesse Jackson has also sought standing to reproach the Hasidim for their fight with Dinkins, and he's done so by castigating unnamed black anti-Semites who, in his view, are far less dangerous than named white ones. Representative Charles Rangel has now also entered the fray, warning the Hasidim to lay off Dinkins, lest they provoke "a backlash ... tragically and anti-Semitically." As Eric Breindel pointed out in his syndicated column, this is not a caution; this is a threat. And backlash can have but one meaning here—violence.

IMAGINE IF NEW YORK'S GAYS OR blacks had been menaced with such an intimidating admonition—keep quiet or else!—by a leading politician. Surely the *Times* would have editorialized and liberal Jews would have been outraged, and rightly so. Thus far, though, they haven't been heard from *in re* Charles Rangel. Ruth Wisse argues that, unstudied and untaught though it is, anti-Semitism is "the most durable ideology of the twentieth century." One reason for its durability is that many of those it targets won't face the truth, that it is alive and well, and not primarily in Germany.

MARTIN PERETZ

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

A Matter of Survival

Dear President-elect Clinton, I wrote a couple of weeks ago to urge that you continue supporting the education goals because doing so is the best way of raising the achievement of all our students. This is something that needs to be done over the long run. But there are problems that cry out for immediate solutions. I'm talking about the terrible difficulties that face many of our urban school districts—violence, crumbling schools, an influx of immigrant children who need extra resources at a time when budgets are shrinking. And I'm hoping that when you map out your economic priorities, you'll find a way to help these urban schools. For some children, it's a matter of survival.

● **Violence.** Schools, which should be havens for children living in dangerous neighborhoods, are no longer safe. We can hardly pick up a paper these days without reading that some child has been wounded or killed on a school playground or in the halls—often by another child. Last winter, two youngsters were shot dead in a Brooklyn high school where, three months earlier, another youngster had been killed and a teacher shot. Just last week, a young boy whose mother said she was careful to take him to school every day was killed—in school. She asked, in agony, what she could have done to keep him safe. Psychologists tell us these children resemble kids from Beirut or Northern Ireland—other war zones. Teachers suffer from stress that is almost beyond endurance.

I know you are aware of this problem because you have spoken of hiring 100,000 extra policemen to make our neighborhoods safe. Please give priority to urban schools so that teachers can concentrate on teaching and youngsters can feel the sense of security they need if they are to learn—or even to grow up healthy and sane.

● **Crumbling schools.** In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol describes urban schools that we'd be shocked to find in poor third-world countries. In East St. Louis, Illinois, a junior high and a high school had to be closed twice in one week because sewage from backed-up toilets flooded the buildings. In New York, Kozol visited a school where the staircase became a waterfall when it rained and where blackboards were so badly damaged that teachers feared kids would cut their hands if they did boardwork.

Studies tell us that one U.S. school in eight is in bad enough shape to impede student learning. Taking care of



We can hardly pick up a paper these days without reading that a child has been wounded or killed on a school playground or in the halls—often by another child.

each of these schools is a long-term proposition. But I hope that when you are planning the infrastructure repair you have mentioned, you will remember these crumbling schools. Children shouldn't have to suffer from conditions like these.

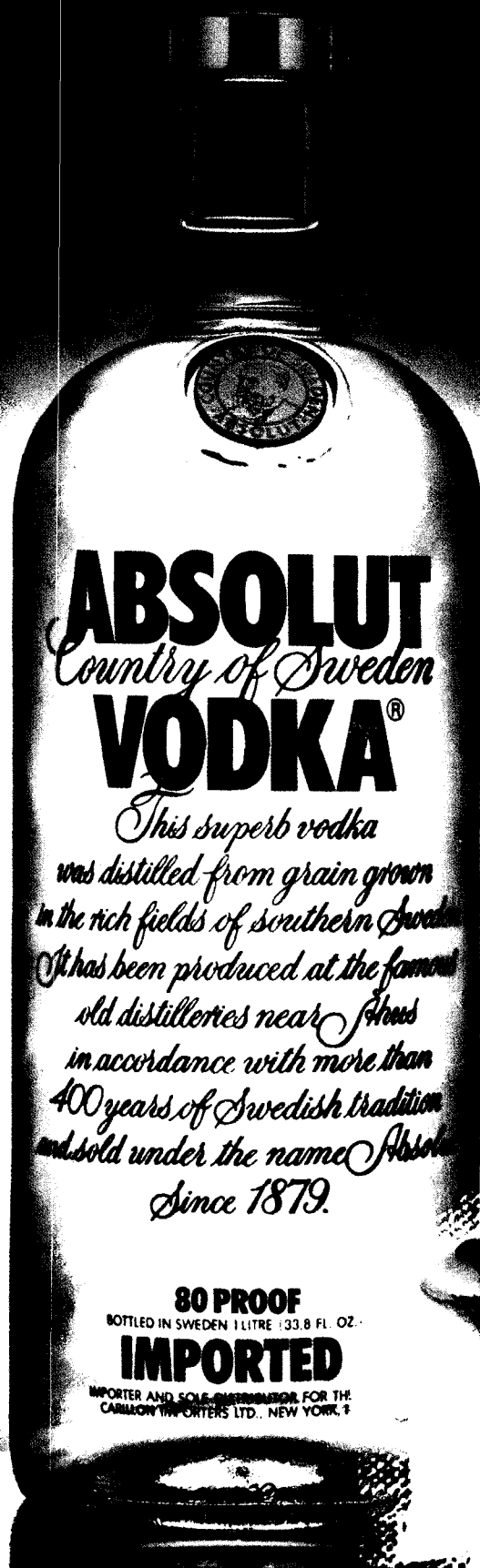
● **The influx of immigrant children.** We've always been proud of the role our schools have played in helping transform immigrant children into citizens. But the recent flood of immigrants has taxed urban school systems to the limit. Immigrant families often have problems connected with being strangers in a new country. They are likely to live in poor housing and work at poorly paid jobs. If the parents don't speak English, they probably have a hard time getting access to health care. And the children have their own problems trying to get accustomed to American ways. To help these children and their families get on their feet, the schools offer many extra and specialized services. Right now, urban school districts are serving numerous—and extremely diverse—immigrant children. In New York City, 36 percent of the student body are from non-English-speaking families, and students come from 167 different countries. In Dade County, 25 percent of students were born outside the U.S., and come from 132 countries. And they keep coming: During the last 3 years, over 1,000 additional immigrant children have enrolled in Dade County schools each month.

The special problems of school districts with students who are recent immigrants are well known. But it's one thing to have a handful of students who need special help and another when a very substantial proportion of students does—as is the case in New York City, Dade County and also Los Angeles, to name only three. Then, problems mount geometrically rather than arithmetically; and school districts that have this kind of responsibility are sinking under it.

Some United States Peace Corps volunteers bound for developing countries are getting on-the-job training right here in the U.S.—in Camden, N.J. But Camden is not the only place where they could see poor children going to school in third-world conditions. All these children deserve much, much better than that, and they are looking with hope to your administration.

Sincerely, Al Shanker

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1992 by Albert Shanker.



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